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Sociological Perspectives

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Introduction: Sociological perspective**Lesson 01****Topic 001: What is Sociological Perspective?**

Perspective means a view or an outlook or an approach or an *imagination* (of the reality).

An approach to understanding of society.

Sociological theory is a verbal/written image of society. Logical assumptions about the working of society. An orientation for looking at various features of social world, which can eventually be translated into scientific theory. Different ways of understanding the society, its operations, its interpretations, and its explanations. Goal is to develop general principles of the working of societies.

When sociologist “do sociology,” they approach their subject with certain assumptions. They emphasize particular research methods, and they have particular types of questions they want answered. Have ways of looking at things which sociological theories advance. Like: Differences in the way theories are formulated: deductively or inductively → *Logic used*.

Hence sociological theory may look like a group of perspectives for the understanding human behavior.

Aim: To develop principles that govern the functioning of the societies.

Sociologists have looked at society from different perspectives. Levels of analysis: look at society on the basis of *subject matter*: is it at *macro* level or *micro* level.

Macrosociology: concerned with large-scale characteristics of social structure and roles.

Microsociology: concerned with person-to-person encounters.

Functionalism and conflict theory concerned with the overall characteristics of social structure, and general nature of social institutions. *Macro level*. Yet, equally interested in the perceptions and decisions of individual people. The perspectives of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology examine human interaction in the minutest detail. *Micro level*. Actions, experiences, and perceptions at individual level are a priori. Yet they do not ignore social prescriptions. Rational choice theories may venture on both *macro/micro* approaches Mostly (e.g. Blau) focus on individual’s decisions and choices, yet linked to structural qualities as society’s legitimacy. View of human beings: Is behavior *predictable*? Is it Primarily determined by the *environment*? (Functionalist and conflict) Or is human behavior governed by *creativity*. Symbolic interactionism, phenomenology. Me and I. i.e. behavior unpredictable. Emphasis on human social action. *Creativity*.

Topic 002: What is Sociological Perspective? (Cont.)

Motivation for human social action: Are human beings motivated by personal interests or by social values?

For functionalists: People's motives and behavior is a function of *social values* they internalize. Emphasis on socially instilled values. Conflict theorists see "interests" as primary or main force behind every behavior. By-pass or temper with the social values. Symbolic interactionism sees social values as incorporated into the "me"; interests hardly appear. Phenomenology emphasizes values rather than interests. People "trust" others to behave in certain situation-specific ways. Trust as the basis of behavior. Rational choice theorists look at the importance of social values and tastes, which define people's preferences. Look for social status.

4. Scientific approach: perspectives differ in their methods of argument and research. Advocacy of deductive or inductive reasoning.

Advocacy of natural science approach → deductive approach: spell out the concepts/variables hypothesis, theories.

Inductive approach: know the reality, develop hypotheses, build theory.

Functionalism, conflict theory, and rational choice theory → deductive.

Symbolic interactionism and phenomenology → inductive.

Deductive approach uses quantitative data, while inductive approach focuses on qualitative data.

Comparison of Different Sociological Perspectives

Level of Analysis	Macro	Micro
	Functionalism Conflict	Symbolic Interactionism Phenomenology Rational Choice
View of Human Beings	Predictable	Creative
	Functionalism Conflict Rational Choice	Symbolic Interactionism Phenomenology
Motivation for Human Social Action	Values	Interests
	Functionalism Phenomenology Symbolic Interactionism	Conflict Rational Choice
Scientific Approach	Deductive	Inductive
	Functionalism Conflict Rational Choice	Symbolic Interactionism Phenomenology

Perspectives differ in their objectives of *describing* or *explaining*, or even *predicting* the social realities. Each has contributed to human understanding of societies. Is this understanding and explanation an end in itself i.e. meeting the curiosity. Can this understanding be used as a means to some other ends e.g. end can be to control and manage the undesirable realities of life? Scientific deductive explanation is a powerful technological tool with tight statistical correlations and predictions.

Yes, description is a means to understanding → a means to making the explanations of the reality → a means to predicting and managing the reality → for the well-being of society. Given the complexity of human behavior, social sciences do have limitations in making universal predictions.

Lesson 02**Major sociological perspectives****Topic 003: Functionalism**

How does a society survive? How do the social systems created by the society exist? Understanding the requirements for the survival of a society and its social systems is a major feature of functional perspective.

Understand the process of functioning and survival. Creates different structures needed for its functioning and survival. Perspective was labeled as “structural functionalism.” Later on the main proponents of this perspective abandoned the word “structural.”

Understand how individuals’ actions are organized through their roles in social institutions. Individuals learn the roles through socialization. Institutions contribute to society’s basic functional requirements.

Perspective is concerned with the overall functioning of the social system i.e. the society, therefore functionalism has macro-sociological focus. Though analysis is at macro level, yet it can be applied to micro and meso level. See how individual actions are regulated by society. Regulated through socialization and cultural requirements. Helps in the maintenance of equilibrium in the society. For purposes of theorization it follows a deductive approach. Natural science approach.

Topic 004: Functionalism

Main emphasis on three elements:

1. The general interrelatedness or interdependence of the system’s parts;
2. The existence of “normal” state of affairs, or state of equilibrium, comparable to the normal or healthy state of the organism; and
3. The way that all parts of the system reorganize to bring things back to normal.
4. Actions are individual and voluntary, yet regulated by social values and norms.
5. Look for value consensus. Individuals will be morally committed to society.
6. Within the macro-sociological perspective, functionalism is in direct contrast to conflict perspective.
7. Functionalism emphasizes the unity of society, conflict theorists stress the divisions within society.

Topic 005: Conflict Perspective

Conflict perspective is a major alternative to functionalism to understanding and analyzing the general structure of societies. Increasingly popular and important perspective in contemporary sociology. Less unified perspective than others. Differences. Despite the disagreements among conflict theorists, they share a number of important assumptions. Have a distinctive way of

looking at the society. Highlight the limitations of functionalism. Demonstrates that conflict is a necessary feature of social life. Functionalists look at societies as integrated parts of social systems. Parts depend on each other and work together to create equilibrium. Society has the mechanism to handle the conflict, if any. Conflict theorists see society as an arena in which groups fight for power. How this conflict is controlled? What is the basis of social order? Basis is force rather than consent. No permanent control. Temporarily controlled by the powerful by suppressing their rivals. Functionalists consider civil law as means to social integration. Conflict theorists see civil law as a way of defining and upholding a particular social order that benefits powerful at the expense of others. Powerful the real beneficiaries of social order.

Topic 006: Conflict Perspective

Conflict perspective incorporates three central and connected assumptions:

1. People have number of basic “interests,” things they want and attempt to acquire. Common to all. Nothing specified.
2. Power is the core of social relationships.

Power is source of conflict. Power is not only scarce and unequally divided but also coercive. Concern with the distribution of those resources that give people more or less power. Those who have such resources, inevitably get power over those don't have.

3. Values and ideas are seen as weapons used by different groups to advance their own ends rather than as means of defining a whole society's identity and goals.

Ideas represent group interests, especially under the categories of “ideology” and “legitimacy.” Can this conflict be eradicated? Social scientists divided. Moral obligation to give subjective (value) judgment vs. objective analysts.

Topic 007: Social Exchange/Rational Choice

People act and interact. Through action people realize their interests. How interests are translated into action? What interests does social action serve? Who benefits from any system of interaction? People's actions are guided by strategies. (consciously or unconsciously). To what extent these strategies are rational? How efficiently particular courses of action achieve desired results.

Assumption:

People more or less act rationally and on the bases of their interests.

Rewarding exchange of interactions are repeated.

Reward can be basis for rational choice.

Continual exchange of actions makes people conditioned.

Emergence of patterns of social exchange . Enables sociologists to predict patterns of behavior on both small and large scales. Homans and Blau are the two prominent names in this perspective. Exchange perspective explains action by what works effectively for actors seeking to realize their

interests. Rationalization. Actors understand those interests, partly based on their previous experiences. What the actors are interested in i.e. goal? What mix of resources do they have? Constraints. With an accurate understanding of the interests actors pursue and the mix of resources and constraints they face, one can predict or explain their actions.

Topic 008: Social Exchange/Rational Choice

Rational choice theory builds on similar foundation as that of social exchange. Emphasis on identifying rational courses of action in the abstract and comparing with actual behavior. Rational: is it efficient? Exchange perspective is rooted in interpersonal relations. Rational choice perspective is more often used to identify the effects of interdependent actions of individuals on the behavior of the social system as a whole. Call it “Methodological individualism.” Social systems are rarely seen as wholes. Observe the actions and interactions of actors within the system. From such observations theorists make inferences about the system as a whole. System could refer to an entire national or global society. Analyses are usually focused on smaller social systems: a particular organization, a party, or social movement. On this basis of observations within the system, both exchange and rational choice theories seek to explain the operation of the system. Emphasis is not on particular individuals in terms of their personal feelings or motivations. Focus is on aggregate patterns of action in the social system. Toward this end, simplifying assumptions about behavior are often employed. The most basic is the postulate of rationality. Means that people are purposive actors who seek to *optimize*. Given a set of potential actions, people choose the one that provides them the best outcome.

Topic 009: Interactionism

With respect to the levels of analysis, sociology has been broadly divided into: macro and micro. Sociology that focuses primarily on persons and interpersonal relations is called “micro-sociology.” Sociology that focuses primarily on persons and interpersonal relations is called “micro-sociology.” Though interpersonal relations can be relevant on a large scale as well. e.g. The interaction of the Board of Directors of a corporation can determine the employment status of thousands. Similarly micro-decisions, each small in itself, can be aggregated to have large scale effects. For example: Individuals or families make decisions to have children or to migrate can have implications for population growth. Symbolic interactionism is one of such prominent perspectives.

G. H. Mead laid down its foundation. H. Blumer was the important pioneer. Emphasis is on how, during the course of interaction, people develop:

- Their own identities;
- Their senses of how society works; and
- What constitutes fair play.
- Theoretically this perspective is linked to the pragmatist school of Philosophy, which emphasizes:

- The ways in which not only social order but all knowledge is achieved in practically situated action.

Topic 010: Interactionism

Among the interactionists, phenomenology is another sociological perspective. Call it Science of phenomena. Emphasizes close observation of human experience and especially the ways in which the basic categories of understanding are formed. Perspective was led by Alfred Schutz. Has major influence on “ethnomethodology,” an approach developed by H. Garfinkel and colleagues in California. Ethno-method-ology: study of methods used by people.

The methods ordinary people use to construct their everyday understanding of:

- social life,
- confronting the practical challenges, and
- shaping reality through the ways in which they conceptualize it.
- It is a bottom-up than a top-down approach to the study of culture.

For the macro-sociologists, humans are shaped by the social system in which they act (top down approach). For the micro sociologists the social system itself is human creation (bottom-up approach). Rather than social order being imposed on individuals by the system, micro sociologists see social order as produced from below, through exchange of social interaction. Social order is created and maintained by the institutions humans create. Society itself rests on the ability of human beings to communicate with one another through use of symbols. Highly evolved capacity for communication based on complex, abstract symbolic systems – specialty of human beings. Create language.

Interactionism characterized by three common elements:

- Emphasis on face to face interaction of humans rather than on the working of the social system as an abstract entity. Focus on Interactions of concrete human beings rather than abstract social units e.g. classes.
- Emphasis on meanings rather than functions i.e. sociology has to be an interpretive science. Objective accounts of subjective motivations of individual actions. Look at the meanings that people assigned to their actions and interactions.
- Emphasis on lived experience rather than an abstracted concept of society. Focus on the way human agents experience regularized patterns of social interaction, and support them. Exchange of greeting rituals have important symbolic meanings. Understand and learn.

Lesson 03**Functionalist Perspective****Topic 011: Intellectual Roots-I**

Functionalism held dominant position among contemporary sociological theories. Other perspectives emerged as a challenge to it. Due to its dominance, some sociologists, like Kingsley Davis, claimed that: Sociological analysis and functional analysis are one and the same.

Davis argued that sociology involves:

- (1) examining the role (or function) that an institution or type of behavior plays in society and the way it is related to other social features, and
- (2) explaining it in essentially “social” terms.

The most important intellectual ancestors of modern functionalism are the sociologists Comte, Spencer, Pareto, and Durkheim. Among the anthropologists Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski are to be mentioned. Comte, Spencer, and Pareto emphasized the interdependence of parts of the social system. Durkheim emphasized integration, or solidarity which inspired both Radcliffe-Brown’s and Malinowski’s analysis of the function of social institutions. Auguste Comte, founder of sociology, derived his interest in “statics” (order) and “dynamics” (progress) in society from his investigation of the foundations of social stability. What brings order? Order is same as equilibrium. Dynamics is more like change. Study forces that produce order/change. Herbert Spencer was also the forerunner of functionalism. Spencer’s concept of differentiation meant the mutual dependence of unlike parts of the system. Differentiation is necessary for system’s interrelatedness and integrity. Vilfredo Pareto patterned his system of sociology on physiochemical system characterized by interdependence of parts and adjustive changes, rather than biological organism. For Pareto, the “molecules” of social system were individuals with interests, drives, and sentiments. Provided precise description of a social system in terms of interrelations and mutual dependencies among parts. Parsons borrowed Pareto’s idea of dynamic or “moving” equilibrium that produces harmony for the system. That is how systems adapt to change while maintaining equilibrium.

Topic 012: Intellectual Roots-II

Emile Durkheim is an important sociological forerunner of modern functionalism. Comte’s influence on Durkheim and, in turn, Durkheim’s impact on Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski were of crucial importance to its development. Durkheim was an important role model for Parsons. Parsons and Merton showed their indebtedness to Durkheim. Influence of Durkheim can also be seen on symbolic interactionist and phenomenological perspectives. Some of Durkheim’s most important functionalist ideas are a result of his lifelong interest in the concept of integration. The incorporation of individual into social order. Integration or social solidarity is important for the maintenance of social equilibrium. In *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim examined the function of division of labor. Durkheim viewed social evolution as a movement from mechanical solidarity of tribal societies to organic solidarity characteristic of industrial societies. Collective

conscience vs. individualism. Laws, morals, customs, and fashions are social facts, call them *institutions*, all are functional. Punishment: is it functional? A cause to the creation of collective intensity of sentiments. Durkheim called sociology as science of institutions and their functioning. Social integration, anomie, and suicide. Functionality. Too much integration may lead to altruistic suicide. Too little to egoistic suicide. Durkheim looked at religion as a strong integrative force in the old and modern society. Role in the transmission of values. Functional.

Topic 013: Intellectual Roots-III

Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, the two anthropologists adopted Durkheim's approach to analysis of societies. Malinowski was the first to use the term *functional* for this type of analysis. Link between Malinowski's work and modern functionalism is sociology. Talcott Parsons studied under Malinowski at the London School of Economics. Malinowski's and Radcliffe-Brown's levels of analysis differed. Malinowski concerned with psychological needs and functions, which he believed all societies developed ways to fulfill. Radcliffe-Brown: focused on sociological ones – the functions of institutions in the social system. Functions of magical rites: For Malinowski, magic was used more in open-sea fishing than in inland fishing because the individual's feelings of danger and insecurity on the open sea. Magic both developed and functioned to reduce these feelings. Radcliffe-Brown treated magic in terms of social functions. Societies define what is dangerous and threatening. Individuals are taught by society to have appropriate responses to these situations. Magical rites exist to maintain an orderly society; their function is social, not individual. When Parsons developed his functionalist framework, he borrowed more heavily from Radcliffe-Brown. RB emphasized social needs and social explanation, than from Malinowski. Although modern functionalism has roots in the works of Comte, Spencer, and Pareto and is also indebted to Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, it owes its greatest debt to Durkheim.

Lesson 04**Functionalism (Talcott Parson-I)****Topic 014-015: Talcott Parsons System Levels**

The concept of a system is at the core of any discussion or Parsonian theory. Parsons stated, "The concept of system in the action field as in others, has been central to my thinking from a very early stage." His general theory of action, in which he gives his overall picture of how societies are structured and fit together, includes four systems: the cultural system, the social system, the personality system, and the behavioral organism as a system. How does Parsons define his four system levels? First of all is the cultural system, in which the basic unit of analysis is "meaning," or "symbolic system." Some examples of symbolic systems are religious beliefs, languages, and national values. As we would expect, at this level Parsons focuses on shared values. A key concept here is socialization, whereby societal values are internalized by a society's members; that is, they make society's values their own. In Parsons' view, socialization is a very powerful integrative force in maintaining social control and holding a society together. The preeminence of the cultural system in Parsons' thinking is illustrated in his statement: It is quite clear that the high elaboration of human action systems is not possible without relatively stable symbolic systems where meaning is not contingent on highly particularized situations.... It is such a shared symbolic system which functions in interaction which will here be called a cultural tradition. The social system is the next level in Parsons' scheme. Here the basic unit is "role interaction." Parsons devoted an entire book to this topic, and he defined the social system thus:

A social system consists in a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation which has at least a physical or environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the .. optimization of gratification" and whose relation to their situations, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared symbols.

In Parsons' definition of a social system, can mean two or more, and actors can be people or coactivates. Thus, a social system can be made up of anything two people interacting in a restaurant to the relationships within the United Nations, where the actors are member nations. The relationship of the social system to the cultural system is apparent in Parsons' reference to "culturally structured and shared symbols," which define the way actors interact. In addition, Parsons shows how the other two systems penetrate the social system as well. He refers to "individual actors" whose motive is self-gratification because of the nature of their personality system, and he brings in a "physical or environmental aspect," which sets boundaries around this situation where interaction takes place and is itself a function of the behavioral organisms involved.

According to Parsons, the basic unit of the personality system is the individual actor, the human person. His focus at this level is on individual needs, motives, and attitudes, such as the "motivation toward gratification," which he emphasizes in the definition we have quoted. As we shall see, "motivation toward gratification" corresponds to both conflict

theory's and exchange theory's explicit assumptions that people are "self-interest- ed" or "profit maximizers."

In the fourth system, the behavioral organism, the basic unit is the human being in its biological sense—that is, the physical aspect of the human person, including the organic and physical environment in which the human being lives. In referring to this system, Parsons explicitly mentions the organism's central nervous system and motor activity. One of Parsons' later interests was in sociobiology, which is the study of the bio- logical basis of social behavior.

Topic 016-17: Parsons' theory of action

Parsons' (1937) early theory of social action was based on an intensive critical analysis of the works of Alfred Marshall, Vilfredo Pareto, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber—all early theorists from across the Atlantic. His major argument was that these theorists converged, despite different starting points, in pointing to the essential elements of a voluntaristic theory of social action. Parsons regarded his contribution as identifying these crucial elements and integrating them in a more general and systematic perspective. In pursuing this goal, he made extensive use of the means-ends framework. His analysis was complex, but the basic ideas are consistent with our common sense and everyday experience. In its barest essentials, his argument is that all social action has the following characteristics:

1. it is goal directed (or has an **end**);
2. it takes place in a situation that provides **means** individuals can use to achieve their goal, plus **conditions** the actor cannot change, and
3. it is **normatively regulated** with respect to the choice of both ends and means.

In effect, Parsons' analysis was intended as a comprehensive synthesis of the opposing viewpoints of positivism and idealism.⁵ Although positivism itself is not a unified theoretical or philosophical position, the point to note is that it involves a deterministic model of human behavior. In Parsons' terms, this implied that behavior could be adequately explained as being determined by either the situation or the underlying characteristics of human nature. This emphasis ignored the role of individual choice, as well as the normative orientation that governed and regulated individuals' choices with regard to the means employed and the ends or goals that are sought.

Parsons distinguished between a utilitarian branch of positivism and an "antiintellectual" branch. In the utilitarian branch, represented by British economist Alfred Marshall, individuals consciously adapt to the environment in their efforts to meet their individual needs. In the antiintellectual branch, individuals are influenced by conditions of which they may not be consciously aware. These include underlying sentiments that motivate their actions as suggested in Pareto's early theory. Durkheim also started from a positivist foundation in Parsons' view. This was manifested in his emphasis on the external reality of social facts which he developed in opposition to the individualistic approach of utilitarianism. Later, however, Durkheim moved toward a position of sociological idealism in showing how individuals internalize collective representations (ideas, beliefs, values, and normative patterns) in their subjective consciousness. In contrast to positivism, idealism emphasized the normative orientation that governs individuals' choices. Its major shortcoming in Parsons' view was that it did not deal adequately with the constraining effects of the environment or with the limitations and predispositions of human beings' biological characteristics. Cultural values do not implement themselves automatically;

instead, human energy must be expended in confronting and overcoming obstacles and in making use of material resources in an effort to achieve them or have them manifested in their individual and collective lives. Of the four theorists Parsons analyzed, it was Weber, in Parsons' view, who demonstrated most systematically that cultural values and norms can be incorporated in a comprehensive model of social action that also recognizes the importance of material conditions and the social environment. Both emphases—the subjective

normative orientation and the objective situational context—are crucial for a general theory of action. The normative orientation gives direction to individuals' choices of means and ends, while the situational context provides opportunities and sets constraints for individuals' actions. The basic argument in Parsons' voluntaristic theory of social action is that individuals make choices, but their choices are normatively regulated with regard to the goals individuals pursue and the means they employ to reach these goals.



Lesson 05**Functionalism (Talcott Parson-II)****Topic 018-019: The pattern variables**

Parsons' voluntaristic theory of social action, as described above, is crucial as a starting point, but the ultimate goal is to explain the variations in people's subjective orientations through which their goal-directed behavior is normatively regulated. To this end it is important to establish criteria for distinguishing different types of subjective normative orientations. To what extent do these orientations vary in different situations? In collaboration with Edward A. Shils and other colleagues, Parsons dealt with these questions in a 1951 book, *Toward a General Theory of Action*, in which categories were developed for distinguishing different types of subjective orientations (Parsons and Shils, eds., 1951). The question of how individuals' orientations and resulting actions fit together in a social system was addressed more fully in Parsons' book entitled *The Social System* (1951). The **pattern variables** were the most general and influential of these classification systems, although their long-term influence is not as great as Parsons' strategy for functional analysis of social systems (to be described shortly).

The pattern variables were intended to refer simultaneously to the motivational orientations plus the value orientations involved in social action (Parsons and Shils, 1951:58–60). The concept of **motivation** refers to a person's desire to maximize gratifications and minimize deprivations, including the goal of balancing immediate needs with long-range goals (which often requires **deferring gratification**). The **value orientation** refers to the normative standards that govern an individual's choices and priorities with respect to different needs and goals. These pattern variables help insure mutually compatible orientations among people as they interact. Essentially, they represent five dichotomous choices that must be made, explicitly or implicitly, in relating to another person in any social situation. They are as follows:

1. Affectivity versus affective neutrality
2. Self-orientation versus collectivity orientation
3. Universalism versus particularism
4. Ascription versus achievement
5. Specificity versus diffuseness

Affectivity versus Affective Neutrality—This is the dilemma of whether or not to seek or expect **emotional gratification** through a particular action or relationship. The **affective side** means that individuals are oriented toward becoming emotionally involved with one another, such as expressing affection or otherwise providing gratification of one another's emotional needs. Relations between lovers or family members illustrate this choice. In contrast, **neutrality** means that individuals avoid emotional involvement or immediate gratification. The relationship between a doctor and patient or between a social worker and client would illustrate this pattern.

Self-orientation versus Collectivity Orientation—This dilemma involves the question of which **party's interests** has priority. A **self-orientation** means that the individual's own personal interests are expected to have priority, while a **collectivity orientation** would indicate that one is obligated to give priority to the needs or interests of others, or of the collectivity as a whole. Market transactions as described in the last chapter are expected to be governed by a self-orientation. In

contrast, family relations, relations between close friends, or relations in a church congregation are expected to reflect a collectivity orientation, sometimes governed by shared moral values requiring the sacrifice of individual interests.

Universalism versus Particularism—This variable concerns the scope of the normative standards governing a social relationship. The universalistic pattern involves standards that apply to all others who can be classified together in terms of impersonally defined categories. In American society, the ideal of the equality of all citizens under the law, plus laws prohibiting racial discrimination in education, employment, and housing, are examples of universalistic norms. In contrast, the particularistic pattern involves standards based on specific relationships or specific characteristics people may share. Norms that apply only to one's family, for example, to persons in the same ethnic or racial group, or to others in one's own age category would be particularistic.

Ascription versus Achievement (or Quality versus Performance)—Parsons contrasted this variable (plus the following one) with the preceding three in that this variable (plus the following one) concern individuals' **perceptions of others** instead of their own **personal orientation**. Ascription involves evaluating others in terms of who they are, while achievement is based on their accomplishments or capabilities. Ascriptive characteristics may include one's family background, for example, as well as gender, racial or ethnic background, or physical characteristics. In contrast, the achievement pattern may be illustrated by policies requiring career promotions to be based on merit, for example, as well as the use of objective measures (such as test scores) in determining college admission or graduation.

Specificity versus Diffuseness—This variable deals with the scope of an individual's obligations toward another person. If mutual obligations are narrow and precisely defined (such as formal contractual relations, for example), the pattern would be one of specificity. In contrast, if there is a wide range of gratifications that are exchanged, the pattern would be one of diffuseness. The distinction can readily be understood if we consider how obligations and expectations are negotiated. In a relationship characterized by specificity, the burden of proof would be on the person making a demand on the other party to justify that demand; in contrast, with a pattern of diffuseness, the burden of proof would be on the person on whom a demand is made to explain if this expectation cannot be met.

The pattern variables can readily be related to Tönnies' well-known distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* types of social relations, perhaps even being seen as basic dimensions of Tönnies' typology.

By providing a set of categories for classifying subjective orientations, the pattern variables thus represent an advance beyond Parsons' earlier analysis of the general characteristics of voluntaristic social action. The next step, then, would be to try to explain why the pattern variables assume the values that they do in different situations. This leads eventually to Parsons' analysis of the how individuals' orientations are related to the dynamics of social systems in fulfilling their functional requirements, particularly those of the overall society.

Topic 020-022: Functioning of institutional structures

All social relationships involve mutual orientations of two or more persons toward one another, and these orientations can be classified in terms of the pattern variables. Although their actions are goal-oriented, reflecting their concerns with their overall gratification/deprivation balance, Parsons' goal is to emphasize that the specific manner in which goals are pursued and gratification is sought will be governed by the normative standards and value orientations of the overall culture. Also, in addition to satisfying individual needs and interests, additional requirements must be fulfilled for social relationships and systems to endure—and this is the specific emphasis of functional theory. Such requirements include, for example, maintaining compatible mutual orientations (not only in terms of general cultural values and norms but also in terms of specific role expectations) and developing ways to resolve conflicts. This applies to all social systems, from the simplest dyadic relationship to a complex society.

By the early 1950s, Parsons gave higher priority to the functional requirements of society (and other social systems) than to the categorization of individuals' orientations in terms of his pattern variables. Since social systems are made up of individuals, one underlying requirement is to insure that the basic needs of their members are met and that their motivations are linked to their roles in the system. However, the functional requirements of social systems are not the same as the needs and goals of individuals. Parsons' social system focus gave rise to an in-depth analysis of the social structures (or subsystems) through which the functional requirements of social systems (including the overall society in particular) are met. Although the pattern variables were no longer the primary focus of attention, they can be used to categorize and analyze the basic structures of the social relations through which these functional requirements are met. An early formulation of this structural-functional approach was provided in Parsons' (1951) book, *The Social System* (see also Parsons, 1949:212–237).

The transition from individuals' actions to social structures requires clarification of some additional concepts. A “**role**” refers to patterns of action that are expected by virtue of a being in a particular relationship or occupying a particular position or status. Actions that an individual is expected to perform are the responsibilities of a role; the actions or responses expected of others constitute its rights. The concept of role is linked with the concept of status, which in this usage refers to a person's position in a relationship or social system, not to prestige. Roles (or status-roles) are the most elementary units of social structure and, in Parsons' terms, are “the primary mechanisms through which the essential functional prerequisites of the system are met.” (Parsons, 1951:115) Roles are organized into larger units referred to as “institutions.” The concept of **institution** in this context does not refer to a particular organization, but to a set of roles and normative patterns that are relevant to a particular functional problem.

Parsons used “**collectivity**” to refer to a specific social organization. Thus, for example, in contrast to a particular business firm, the economy as an institution The Strategy of Structural–Functional Analysis consists of a whole set of institutionalized patterns such as private property, occupational choice, the monetary and credit system, contractual relationships, bureaucratic forms of organization, and the like. As Parsons explains the distinction, “A collectivity is a system of concretely interactive specific roles. An institution on the other hand is a complex of patterned elements in role-expectations which may apply to an indefinite number of collectivities.” (Parsons, 1951:115)

Functional Requirements and Institutional Structures of Societies

A major goal of Parsons' functional analysis was to explain the mechanisms that produce congruence between individuals' motives and needs, specific role expectations, and shared cultural values. The concepts of **internalization** and **institutionalization** are used to describe the processes involved. Internalization is the process whereby cultural value orientations and role expectations are incorporated into the personality system through socialization. As Parsons explained, "It is only by virtue of internalization of institutionalized values that a genuine motivational integration of behavior in the social structure takes place, that the 'deeper' layers of motivation become harnessed to the fulfillment of role-expectations." (Parsons, 1951:42) While internalization refers to the personality system, institutionalization refers to the social system. When internalized normative commitments lead to actions that fulfill the expectations of others and elicit their approval, they can be said to be institutionalized. As Parsons noted, "In so far as... conformity with a value-orientation standard meets both these criteria, that is, from the point of view of any given actor in the system, it is both a mode of the fulfillment of his own need-dispositions and a condition of 'optimizing' the reactions of other significant actors, that standard will be said to be 'institutionalized.'" (Parsons, 1951:38)

In addition to the need for congruence between the personality system, social system, and cultural system, additional functional requirements can be identified within each of these systems. At the level of the individual personality, there is a need to maintain at least minimal equilibrium between competing needs and motives. Similarly, the pattern of role expectations in the social system must be compatible with minimal needs for order and integration. In addition, mechanisms are needed to solve the recurrent problems of allocation of material resources, rewards, authority, and power, and for integrating and coordinating the actions of various individuals into a system. At the level of the cultural system there is the need to insure a minimal degree of consistency or symbolic congruence in values and cognitive orientations.

Parsons' emphasis on congruence and consistency has been subjected to much criticism. Gideon Sjoberg (pp. 339–345 in Demerath and Peterson, eds., 1967), for Dealing with inconsistencies at the cultural level is a major focus of Margaret Archer's (1988) more recent perspective on cultural elaboration and change. example, suggested that social systems may have contradictory functional requirements involving inconsistent values. To illustrate, a social system may place a high value on equality at the same time that it also places a high value on providing rewards consistent with individuals' accomplishment when levels of achievement clearly differ among different people. Both of these values may be important but for different functional requirements. Sjoberg suggests that a dialectical type of analysis can help direct attention to such internal strains and conflicts. Since functional analysis can be applied to different groups and organizations within society, strains and conflicts may be expected as these groups and organizations seek to fulfill their own functional requirements, sometimes in competition with one another and with the overall society's functional requirements. This means that mechanisms for resolving conflicts must be considered. Moreover, socialization is never so complete that individuals' needs and motives always correspond 100% with the role requirements and value orientations of the society. Because of the strains and tensions that exist between social expectations and individuals' needs and impulses, mechanisms of social control are needed to deal with deviant or rebellious behavior when it occurs (Parsons, 1951:249–325).

Parsons' functional analysis grows out of his analysis of the "human condition" and the need for people to cooperate in adapting to their environment in order to survive. To meet the basic needs of society the following specific types of structures should be expected to be found in some form in any society. (The following discussion of these structures is drawn from Parsons, 1951:153–167.) *Kinship Structures*—concerned with the regulation of sexual expression plus the care and training of the young. Since infants and young children are unable to survive on their own for several years after birth, their ability to function as members of society requires extensive socialization. In modern societies socialization also occurs within the specialized educational establishment.

Instrumental Achievement Structures and Stratification—needed to channel individuals' motivational energy to accomplish tasks necessary for maintaining the overall welfare of society in accordance with its shared values. To motivate the actions needed, rewards are provided in proportion to members' contributions. In this way the stratification system is linked with instrumental achievement. In America (and other modern societies), it is through the occupational structure that instrumental achievement activities are organized. The distribution of money, prestige, and power are coupled closely with the occupational structure within the economic system and other institutions as well. This explanation of stratification has been criticized as justifying inequality and reflecting an unrealistic view of which contributions to society are most valuable or essential. For example, are the contributions of top athletic stars more valuable than the contributions of school teachers?

Religion and Value Integration—the requirement to define cultural values and reinforce commitment to them. Religion has traditionally provided the overarching cultural worldview that gives ultimate significance to the society's shared value system. Even when traditional religions undergo change or deterioration, it is important for societies to develop some type of shared values and ultimate meaning system and to reinforce people's commitments to these shared orientations. This applies particularly to those involving basic moral codes that govern individuals' transactions and relations with one another.

In line with the differences in the contributions that various structures make in fulfilling these requirements, there will be corresponding variations in the pattern variables manifested in them. For example, kinship systems will be characterized by affectivity, particularism, ascription, diffuseness, and a collectivity orientation. Instrumental achievement structures in modern societies, in contrast, are more likely to reflect affective neutrality, universalism, achievement, specificity, and a self orientation. However, the extent to which these variables are involved in instrumental achievement will be heavily influenced by the degree to which instrumental achievement is structurally segregated from the kinship system. If instrumental achievement is carried out within the context of the kinship system (as in many primitive societies or in a family business enterprise in contemporary society), these patterns are likely to be undermined by the conflicting dynamics of kinship ties.

Lesson 06**Functionalism (Talcott Parson-III)****Topic 23-25: The AGIL framework**

Parsons and his colleagues gradually expanded the strategy of functional analysis to other types of social systems, including dyadic relations, small groups, families, and complex organizations. This modified form is more systematic in identifying functional requirements of all types of social systems and also more abstract in analyzing the dynamic interrelations between the component parts (or subsystems) of the system in question. This revised version is referred to as the AGIL model; the acronym refers to generic requirements faced by all types of social systems.

These expanded requirements are as follows:

A—Adaptation to the environment: transforming the material environment to meet needs and to cope with environmental conditions that cannot be changed.

G—Goal attainment: deciding on collective goals (not individual goals) and mobilizing resources to achieve them.

I—Integration: coordinating the actions of the various “parts” of the system, including individual members and other subsystems.

L—Latent pattern maintenance: maintaining and reinforcing commitments to underlying cultural values and motivation to conform.

The expansion of Parsons’ functionalist perspective was related to his collaboration with Robert F. Bales, a Harvard colleague who analyzed the way small task groups in a laboratory setting usually went through a series of predictable phases during the course of a typical meeting. These phases were divided into two broad areas: the **instrumental task** area—adaptation and goal attainment—and the **socioemotional** area—integration and latent pattern maintenance (Parsons et al., 1953:112)¹³ Despite the obvious differences between Bales’ laboratory task groups and the overall society, Parsons and his colleagues suggested that the phases of Bales’ small groups could be explained in the same way as the institutional structures of the overall society. In other words, the basic institutions of society and the phases observed in these small laboratory groups could both be seen as fulfilling their underlying functional requirements as social systems (Parsons et al., 1953).

This AGIL framework is used in most of Parsons’ subsequent writings (e.g., Parsons, pp. 30–79 in Parsons et al., eds., 1961). Along with the pattern variables, it was highly influential at the time and continues to be regarded as the most distinctive feature of his structural/functional theory. However, the specific meaning of each of the functional requirements denoted in the AGIL model may vary for different types of social systems. These requirements are further elaborated below and also related to Parsons’ earlier voluntaristic theory of social action.

Adaptation—All social systems must cope with their physical and social environment. For small groups, the environment would include the larger institutional setting, and for total societies it would include other societies plus the physical or geographical setting. Two dimensions of this requirement may be distinguished. First, there must be “an accommodation of the system to inflexible ‘reality demands’ ” imposed by the environment (or, to use Parsons’ earlier terminology, to the “conditions” of action). Second, there may be some type of “active transformation of the

situation external to the system.” (Parsons et al., 1953:183) This involves utilizing resources available in the environment as the “means” for accomplishing some goal. However, any particular set of means (or resources) may be used for a variety of goals; thus the procurement of means and the accomplishment of goals are analytically distinct. (In everyday life, deciding on strategies to try to earn money is not the same as deciding how to spend it.)

Goal Attainment—This requirement grows out of Parsons’ contention that action is goal directed. In this context, the concern is **not** limited to personal goals but also includes the collective goals individuals share as members of the system. Actual goal achievement represents a kind of intrinsically gratifying culmination of action following the preparatory adaptive activity (such as procuring resources). In the mean/ends framework, goal achievement is the end, while the earlier adaptive activity is the means for achievement (Parsons et al., 1953:184, see also p. 88). At both the individual and the social system levels, there are numerous, sometimes conflicting goals that might be desired. Thus the goal attainment functional requirement will involve making decisions regarding the priority of different goals. For social systems this is essentially a political process.

Integration—To function effectively, social systems must have some solidarity among the individuals involved, and their activities must be coordinated in some fashion for maintaining social order and achieving other desired outcomes, both individual and collective. The integrative **problem refers to the need for appropriate socioemotional attachments and willingness to cooperate in coordinating their interdependent and mutually supportive lines of action.** Socioemotional bonds must not be wholly contingent on personal benefits received; otherwise, social solidarity and willingness to cooperate would be much more precarious, since they would be based on individuals’ personal self-interests, which often leads to conflict.

Latent Pattern Maintenance—The concept of latency suggests a suspension of interaction. Members of any social system are subject to fatigue and satiation as well as the demands of other social systems (or subsystems) in which they may be involved. Therefore, all social systems must provide periods when members are temporarily relieved of the obligations of their roles in the system. During this period of latency, however, their commitment to the system must be maintained and sometimes reinforced. In some cases special mechanisms may be developed to help restore motivational energy and to renew or reinforce commitment to shared cultural values and norms. For large-scale systems, such as total societies, this may take the form of collective rituals such as holiday celebrations like Thanksgiving or July 4 celebrations. For smaller systems, other types of rituals may be followed, such as birthday celebrations, for example. Such rituals also help to reinforce members’ socioemotional bonds and shared moral values, thereby reinforcing their underlying motivational commitments. It is usually not possible to give priority to all four functional requirements simultaneously. In small groups, the dynamics of sequential phases make it possible to shift from one requirement to another. Thus the adaptive requirement of obtaining necessary resources and information occurs **prior** to concentrating on goal accomplishment. The focus on goals typically requires deferring gratification and postponing concerns with emotional solidarity. Goal accomplishment is often then followed by an emphasis on socioemotional integration and solidarity. For the overall society and other large-scale complex systems, these requirements are allocated to distinct functional subsystems (Parsons and Smelser, 1956). **This means that the major institutions of society may be analyzed in terms of their specialized contributions to these functional requirements.**

Parsons used this framework in an intensive analysis of the economic system, including its internal processes as well as the differentiation of the economy from other institutions (Parsons and Smelser, 1956). This long-term differentiation process involved the shift from household to factory production in the early stages of the development of the industrial capitalist economy. In this perspective the economy is viewed as the institution with primary responsibility for fulfilling the **adaptive** functional requirement for the society (Parsons, 1961a; Parsons and Smelser, 1956:20). It is through the economy that raw materials are transformed into resources that can be used for a variety of personal and collective goals, including, for example, meeting individuals' basic biological needs as behavioral organisms (food, shelter, security, and so on).

Similarly, the goal attainment process involves the polity, or political system. The overall goals of society must be distinguished in this framework from individuals' personal goals or the goals of particular organizations within society. Individuals' goals relate to societal goals primarily through their citizenship role. For large-scale and complex societies, however, major decisions regarding societal goals are influenced as much by influential collectivities, such as political parties and various interest groups, as by individual citizens. Large-scale private organizations (corporate actors) may also exert influence on collective goals—sometimes in inappropriate ways that benefit themselves more than the public welfare. Ultimate authority (and power) for mobilizing resources to achieve societal goals is a major responsibility of the various levels of government. In a democratic society, establishing goal priorities is a complex process that involves the political strategies of struggle and conflict, negotiation and compromise.

The functional requirement of integration does not correspond to any specific institutional structure as clearly as adaptation and goal attainment. Integration refers to the need for sufficient solidarity to insure that members are willing to cooperate and try to avoid disruptive conflict as they coordinate and align their actions. Although conflict can never be eliminated, when it occurs it must be carried out within some form of regulatory framework and not be allowed to degenerate into anarchy. The legal system and social control processes deal specifically with the integrative problem, especially when deviance or other breakdowns occur (Parsons, 1961a:40). On a more positive note, all of the normative patterns that encourage and reinforce norms of mutual respect, tact, and courtesy in interpersonal relationships contribute to social integration. Religious institutions contribute to this function by strengthening general ideals for social life, including concerns for the welfare of others that helps restrain egoistic impulses. Even though people may often fail to live up to the moral ideals their religion promotes, many of these ideals (such as the Golden Rule) are reinforced regularly through religious rituals designed to strengthen people's shared beliefs and moral commitments (Parsons, 1961a:40–41).

The latent pattern maintenance function also is related to promotion and reinforcement of commitment to moral values as expressed in the ideals of how people are expected to relate to one another. Another important aspect of this function involves efforts to deal with fundamental questions regarding the ultimate meaning and purpose of life and insuring that social processes are in place to reinforce the basic cultural worldview shared by members of society. As with the integrative problem, several institutional structures are involved with this function. The religious institution is highly relevant because of its promotion and reinforcement of ultimate values, moral codes, and meaning systems. The educational system also contributes in a major way to latent

pattern maintenance by helping to socialize the “new recruits” of each new generation through transmitting the basic cultural patterns that are needed to participate in social life and to prepare to be able to contribute to society as they meet their individual needs and goals. Families are also involved as they socialize their children in the implicitly understood and commonly accepted rules and patterns of social life.

The family is also crucial with respect to the specific notion of latency. Individuals’ participation in society through their occupational roles is typically suspended or “deactivated” within the context of the family. Tensions and fatigue that are built up in the process of fulfilling occupational obligations are alleviated by rest and relaxation at home at the end of the day, on weekends, and during vacations when occupational roles are latent. Through such “tension management,” motivational energy is replenished for eventual resumption of occupational (or other societal) tasks. At the same time, however, the family is also a system in its own right and therefore has its own functional requirements, including adaptive and goal attainment tasks. Figure 1 (below) summarizes the way the four major functional requirements in Parsons’ AGIL model are fulfilled through the major institutional structures of society. Despite the emphasis on institutional specialization in Parsons’ AGIL model, the linkages between institutional structures and functional requirements often seem fuzzy in the real world. In reality, any social structure may contribute at some level to the fulfillment of any of the functional requirements. For example, even though business corporations are primarily part of the economy and contribute to the adaptation requirement, they may also influence the political process of defining societal goals. This would occur, for example, when manufacturers of military supplies seek to increase the priority given to national defense, as suggested by the idea of the “military-industrial” complex. It also occurs when large

Adaptation (Economy)	Goal Attainment (Polity)
Integration (Law enforcement and social control; Religion, Families)	Latent Pattern Maintenance (Religion, Education, Families)

corporations seek to influence legislation that can affect their interests (either appropriately or inappropriately). Similarly, government itself engages in various types of economic activity, such as contracting with private business firms to construct and maintain highways and other infrastructure facilities and providing economic resources to individuals in need through various social welfare programs. Also, even though families are involved primarily in latent pattern maintenance subsystem and integration, they also perform economic functions (such as purchasing goods for consumption) and political functions (participating as citizens through paying taxes and voting).

Lesson 07**Functionalism (Talcott Parson-IV)****Topic 26-27: Functioning of structural differentiation in modern society**

Because of its high level of generality, the AGIL model can readily be used to compare different types of systems or different stages in the history of a society. A key issue in such an analysis is the extent of structural differentiation among the different units (or subsystems) that are involved in performing all of the various tasks that are relevant to the fulfillment of the four primary functional requirements discussed above. With low differentiation, a limited number of structures fulfill multiple functions. In pre-industrial societies, the extended family had primary responsibilities for economic production, social welfare, some aspects of defense and social control, performance of religious rituals, and education of the young. All of these required functions were thus performed in a single type of structural unit, or perhaps a limited number of relatively simple units. In modern urban-industrial societies, however, these functions are performed by different institutions. This means that they exhibit a high degree of structural differentiation (Parsons, 1961a:44–60; 1966:18–25). This process is related to the expansion in the division of labor as analyzed by Durkheim, the long-term outcome of which is increased complexity and institutional specialization.

Historically, the process of differentiation has involved the removal of various functions from the family institution to more specialized institutions. Some examples include the transfer of productive functions to specialized economic structures (such as business firms and factories), plus the assignment of many aspects of the socialization and education process to the specialized structures of formal education. This process has left the family as a more specialized institution, with its major remaining contributions including socialization of the young (a responsibility shared with schools), provision of sexual gratification, and fulfillment of tension release and socioemotional support (Parsons and Bales, 1955; see also Burgess et al. [1963] for a similar analysis).

Another important example of differentiation is the structural separation of religion from the state (as expressed in the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights). This means that the political organization of society is no longer fused with the maintenance of ultimate value commitments as defined by dominant religious traditions. These value orientations still serve as an important source of legitimacy for the political system and sometimes exert major influence on societal goals. However, structural differentiation means that the political establishment is more “on its own.” Value commitments and religious beliefs do not “automatically” translate into support for the existing political structures or policies. It also means that universalistic religions that transcend political boundaries are better able to promote the idea of a universal moral community that includes all people, regardless of their nationality.

Differentiation between religion and politics also means that religion has the potential autonomy to stand on its own in criticizing political policies. This implies a structural source for potential tension between the religious institution and the political establishment. The result in some cases is that abstract religious values can be employed as a catalyst for social and political change.

However, if such efforts lead to imposition of specific religious norms, of the acquisition of political power by religious authorities, the result would be a reduction in the differentiation between religion and politics. For example, contemporary Islamic societies in the Middle East in which religious leaders also function as political leaders reveal a low level of differentiation between religion and politics.

On another level of analysis, the concept of differentiation was used in Parsons and Bales' (1955) analysis of the internal structure of families in modern societies. Their perspective reflected the historical context of the time, but is less relevant to contemporary dual career families. The focus of their analysis was that the father's role and the mother's role in the socialization of children and the maintenance of the household had become more differentiated, with the father specializing in the instrumental task area and the mother in the socioemotional area. In contrast to the historical period in which Parsons and his collaborators did their analysis, the ideal for many people today is for husbands and wives to share in all aspects of family life, with both having careers and earning an income and both involved in household maintenance and child care. Such a process represents a reversal of the process of differentiation.

The process of structural differentiation was a key element in Parsons' perspective on long-range social change at least since his 1956 book with Neil Smelser, *Economy and Society*. His analysis of the process of differentiation is consistent with the image of long-range historical change reflected in classical theorists such as Durkheim, with his focus on the expansion in the division of labor. Additional contemporary examples of this process can be seen in the proliferation of different medical specialties and in the development of specialized areas of scholarly research in different academic disciplines. However, instead of seeing differentiation as an inevitable linear process, probably a better strategy is to see it as an optional pattern that may expand in some areas for a time but may sometimes be reversed. Under some circumstances, functions may be combined that had previously been separated. For example, business firms that adopt "family friendly" policies by having day-care facilities on the premises may be seen as undermining the differentiation between business and childhood socialization. Similarly, employees who utilize new electronic communication technology to work at home are reversing the long-term differentiation between work and home. Within the economic system, the expansion of business enterprises through corporate mergers reverses the pattern of increasing differentiation by bringing disparate enterprises together into a single corporate structure, though the resulting internal divisions of such conglomerate structures may continue to be highly differentiated and retain considerable autonomy. In academic life, the development of interdisciplinary areas of study may be seen as going counter to the long-term trend of increasing specialization and fragmentation.

Despite Parsons' analysis of the evolutionary process of differentiation, his emphasis on social order and equilibrium led to much criticism that he neglected to deal adequately with the topic of social change. Perhaps partly in response, Parsons eventually began to focus more explicitly on long-range social change (Parsons, 1964, 1966). The result was a modern evolutionary theory that incorporated themes developed earlier by Spencer (increased heterogeneity of social structure), Durkheim (increased specialization and growth in organic solidarity), and Weber (increased rationality as reflected in bureaucratization). The long-term process of structural differentiation was seen as having been facilitated and supported by a series of "evolutionary universals" that include: (1) emergence of a stratification system distinct from kinship; (2) cultural

legitimation of emergent political structure; (3) bureaucratic organization; (4) a money system and impersonal market network; (5) universalistic norms; and (6) patterns of democratic association (Parsons, 1964). Although we will not analyze these processes in detail, they were important for the long-range course of social evolution in Parsons' view because they enhanced the overall adaptive capacity of society. Parsons later developed a set of four “developmental processes” that were linked with the four functional requirements specified in the AGIL model (Parsons, 1971:11). These processes, and their linkages with the AGIL model, are as follows:

Adaptive upgrading: Adaptation.

Differentiation: Goal attainment.

Inclusion: Integration.

Value generalization: Latent pattern maintenance.

The process of adaptive upgrading involves the increased efficiency and productivity that is made possible in the economic system (and other systems as well) through specialization and technological development. The process of differentiation is linked with goal attainment, though it is not limited to the political system (which is the primary societal institution involved in goal attainment). Differentiation can, of course, be applied to political structures, both in terms of their differentiation from other institutions and in terms of their internal differentiation (such as the separation of legislative, executive, and judicial functions of government). On a more general level, however, differentiation is associated with goal attainment through the establishment of specialized collectivities (organizations) oriented toward a variety of collective goals (Parsons, 1961b:16–58, especially p. 18). The process of inclusion helps prevent differentiation from leading to fragmentation. Of special significance in this regard is the organization of society on a democratic basis. The notion that government is expected to represent the interests of all members and all segments of society is seen as enhancing loyalty to the “societal community” as such, independently of other loyalties based on ascriptive bonds (race, ethnicity, and local communities) or other associational involvements. Finally, the developmental process of value generalization refers to the tendency for shared values to become more abstract as differentiation increases. Simple societies with a low differentiation may be united by specific normative patterns shared by the entire society. But in a highly differentiated society, specific normative behaviors vary in different institutional settings. Thus the values that are shared must become more abstract and general so as to be relevant for a great variety of normative patterns in different institutional contexts.

Topic 28-29: Theory of Evolutionary Change

Evolutionary Theory Parsons's (1966) general orientation to the study of social change was shaped by biology. To deal with this process, Parsons developed what he called “a paradigm of evolutionary change.” The first component of that paradigm is the process of *differentiation*. Parsons assumed that any society is composed of a series of subsystems that differ in both their *structure* and their *functional* significance for the larger society. As society evolves, new subsystems are differentiated. This is not enough, however; they also must be more adaptive than earlier subsystems. Thus, the essential aspect of Parsons's evolutionary paradigm was the idea of *adaptive upgrading*. Parsons described this process: If differentiation is to yield a balanced, more evolved system, each newly differentiated substructure . . . must have increased adaptive capacity

for performing its *primary* function, as compared to the performance of *that* function in the previous, more diffuse structure. . . . We may call this process the *adaptive upgrading* aspect of the evolutionary change cycle. (Parsons, 1966:22)

This is a highly positive model of social change (although Parsons certainly had a sense of its darker side). It assumes that as society evolves, it grows generally better able to cope with its problems. In contrast, in Marxian theory social change leads to the eventual destruction of capitalist society. For this reason, among others, Parsons often is thought of as a very conservative sociological theorist. In addition, while he did deal with change, he tended to focus on the positive aspects of social change in the modern world rather than on its negative side. Next, Parsons argued that the process of differentiation leads to a new set of problems of *integration* for society. As subsystems proliferate, the society is confronted with new problems in coordinating the operations of these units. A society undergoing evolution must move from a system of ascription to one of achievement. A wider array of skills and abilities is needed to handle the more diffuse subsystems. The generalized abilities of people must be freed from their ascriptive bonds so that they can be utilized by society. Most generally, this means that groups formerly excluded from contributing to the system must be freed for inclusion as full members of the society.

Finally, the *value* system of the society as a whole must undergo change as social structures and functions grow increasingly differentiated. However, since the new system is more diverse, it is harder for the value system to encompass it. Thus a more differentiated society requires a value system that is “couched at a higher level of generality in order to legitimize the wider variety of goals and functions of its subunits” (Parsons, 1966:23). However, this process of generalization of values often does not proceed smoothly as it meets resistance from groups committed to their own narrow value systems. Evolution proceeds through a variety of cycles, but no general process affects all societies equally. Some societies may foster evolution, whereas others may “be so beset with internal conflicts or other handicaps” that they impede the process of evolution, or they may even “deteriorate” (Parsons, 1966:23). What most interested Parsons were those societies in which developmental “breakthroughs” occur, since he believed that once they occurred, the process of evolution would follow his general evolutionary model.

Although Parsons conceived of evolution as occurring in stages, he was careful to avoid a unilinear evolutionary theory: “We do not conceive societal evolution to be either a continuous or a simple linear process, but we can distinguish between broad levels of advancement without overlooking the considerable variability found in each” (1966:26). Making it clear that he was simplifying matters, Parsons distinguished three broad evolutionary stages—primitive, intermediate, and modern. Characteristically, he differentiated among these stages primarily on the basis of cultural dimensions. The crucial development in the transition from primitive to intermediate is the development of language, primarily written language. The key development in the shift from intermediate to modern is “the institutionalized codes of normative order,” or law (Parsons, 1966:26).

Lesson 08**Functionalism (Robert K. Merton-I)****Topic 30-31: Merton's Structural- Functionalism****A Structural-Functional Model**

Merton criticized what he saw as the three basic postulates of functional analysis as it was developed by anthropologists such as Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. The first is the postulate of the functional unity of society. This postulate holds that all standardized social and cultural beliefs and practices are functional for society as a whole as well as for individuals in society. This view implies that the various parts of a social system must show a high level of integration. However, Merton maintained that although it may be true of small, primitive societies, this generalization cannot be extended to larger, more complex societies.

Universal functionalism is the second postulate. That is, it is argued that *all* standardized social and cultural forms and structures have positive functions. Merton argued that this contradicts what we find in the real world. It is clear that not every structure, custom, idea, belief, and so forth, has positive functions. For example, rabid nationalism can be highly dysfunctional in a world of proliferating nuclear arms. Third is the postulate of indispensability. The argument here is that all standardized aspects of society not only have positive functions but also represent indispensable parts of the working whole. This postulate leads to the idea that all structures and functions are functionally necessary for society. No other structures and functions could work quite as well as those that are currently found within society. Merton's criticism, following Parsons, was that we must at least be willing to admit that there are various structural and functional alternatives to be found within society.

Merton's position was that all these functional postulates rely on nonempirical assertions based on abstract, theoretical systems. At a minimum, it is the responsibility of the sociologist to examine each empirically. Merton's belief that empirical tests, not theoretical assertions, are crucial to functional analysis led him to develop his "paradigm" of functional analysis as a guide to the integration of theory and research. Merton made it clear from the outset that structural-functional analysis focuses on groups, organizations, societies, and cultures. He stated that any object that can be subjected to structural-functional analysis must "represent a standardized (that is, patterned and repetitive) item" (Merton, 1949/1968:104). He had in mind such things as "social roles, institutional patterns, social processes, cultural patterns, culturally patterned emotions, social norms, group organization, social structure, devices for social control, etc." (Merton, 1949/1968:104).

Early structural functionalists tended to focus almost entirely on the *functions* of one social structure or institution for another. However, in Merton's view, early analysts tended to confuse the subjective motives of individuals with the functions of structures or institutions. The focus of the structural functionalist should be on social functions rather than on individual motives. *Functions*, according to Merton, are defined as "those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system" (1949/1968:105). However, there is a clear ideological bias when one focuses only on adaptation or adjustment, for they are always positive consequences. It is important to note that one social fact can have negative consequences for

another social fact. To rectify this serious omission in early structural functionalism, Merton developed the idea of a *dysfunction*. Just as structures or institutions could contribute to the maintenance of other parts of the social system, they also could have negative consequences for them. Slavery in the southern United States, for example, clearly had positive consequences for white southerners, such as supplying cheap labor, support for the cotton economy, and social status. It also had dysfunctions, such as making southerners overly dependent on an agrarian economy and therefore unprepared for industrialization. The lingering disparity between the North and the South in industrialization can be traced, at least in part, to the dysfunctions of the institution of slavery in the South.

Merton also posited the idea of *nonfunctions*, which he defined as consequences that are simply irrelevant to the system under consideration. Included here might be social forms that are “survivals” from earlier historical times. Although they may have had positive or negative consequences in the past, they have no significant effect on contemporary society. One example, although a few might disagree, is the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement. To help answer the question of whether positive functions outweigh dysfunctions, or vice versa, Merton developed the concept of *net balance*. However, we never can simply add up positive functions and dysfunctions and objectively determine which outweighs the other, because the issues are so complex and are based on so much subjective judgment that they cannot be calculated and weighed easily. The usefulness of Merton’s concept comes from the way it orients the sociologist to the question of relative significance. To return to the example of slavery, the question becomes whether, on balance, slavery was more functional or dysfunctional to the South. Still, this question is too broad and obscures a number of issues (for example, that slavery was functional for groups such as white slaveholders).

To cope with problems like these, Merton added the idea that there must be *levels of functional analysis*. Functionalists had generally restricted themselves to analysis of the society as a whole, but Merton made it clear that analysis also could be done on an organization, institution, or group. Returning to the issue of the functions of slavery for the South, it would be necessary to differentiate several levels of analysis and ask about the functions and dysfunctions of slavery for black families, white families, black political organizations, white political organizations, and so forth. In terms of net balance, slavery was probably more functional for certain social units and more dysfunctional for other social units. Addressing the issue at these more specific levels helps in analyzing the functionality of slavery for the South as a whole. Merton also introduced the concepts of *manifest* and *latent* functions. These two terms have also been important additions to functional analysis. In simple terms, *manifest functions* are those that are intended, whereas *latent functions* are unintended. The manifest function of slavery, for example, was to increase the economic productivity of the South, but it had the latent function of providing a vast underclass that served to increase the social status of southern whites, both rich and poor. This idea is related to another of Merton’s concepts— *unanticipated consequences*. Actions have both intended and unintended consequences. Although everyone is aware of the intended consequences, sociological analysis is required to uncover the unintended consequences; indeed, to some this is the very essence of sociology. Peter Berger (1963) has called this “debunking,” or looking beyond stated intentions to real effects. Merton made it clear that unanticipated consequences and latent functions are not the same. A latent function is one type of unanticipated consequence, one that is functional for the designated system. But there are two other types of unanticipated consequences: “those that

are dysfunctional for a designated system, and these comprise the latent dysfunctions,” and “those which are irrelevant to the system which they affect neither functionally or dysfunctionally . . . non-functional consequences” (Merton, 1949/1968:105).

As further clarification of functional theory, Merton pointed out that a structure may be dysfunctional for the system as a whole yet may continue to exist. One might make a good case that discrimination against blacks, females, and other minority groups is dysfunctional for American society, yet it continues to exist because it is functional for a part of the social system; for example, discrimination against females is generally functional for males. However, these forms of discrimination are not without some dysfunctions, even for the group for which they are functional. Males do suffer from their discrimination against females; similarly, whites are hurt by their discriminatory behavior toward blacks. One could argue that these forms of discrimination adversely affect those who discriminate by keeping vast numbers of people underproductive and by increasing the likelihood of social conflict.

Merton contended that not all structures are indispensable to the workings of the social system. Some parts of our social system *can* be eliminated. This helps functional theory overcome another of its conservative biases. By recognizing that some structures are expendable, functionalism opens the way for meaningful social change. Our society, for example, could continue to exist (and even be improved) by the elimination of discrimination against various minority groups. Merton’s clarifications are of great utility to sociologists (for example, Gans, 1972, 1994) who wish to perform structural-functional analyses.

Topic 32-33: Merton’s Middle-range Functional Analysis

Robert Merton defined middle-range theories as –

... theories that lie between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day-to-day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop a unified theory that will explain *all* of the observed uniformities of social behavior, social organization and social change.

Middle-range theory is principally used in sociology to guide empirical inquiry. It is intermediate to general theories of social systems which are too remote from particular classes of social behavior, organization and change to account for what is observed and to those detailed orderly descriptions of particulars that are not generalized at all (Merton, 1968:39; emphasis added).

Although Merton believed that the functionalist perspective could serve as a useful starting point and a general guide, the specific theories developed from this orientation should be able to stand on their own merits, supported by appropriate empirical data and guiding additional research. The goal is to be able to explain uniformities in relationships among variables in different social contexts.

Merton insisted on distinguishing individuals’ subjective motives or intentions from the objective social outcomes that flow from their actions. Whether or not these objective consequences enhance a social system’s ability to survive is independent of subjective motives and purposes. Parsons also had recognized that individuals’ motives are expected to reflect their own subjective orientations,

as opposed to the functional requirements of society. In some situations, these orientations may involve giving priority to their own needs and interests. However, Parsons' emphasis on the congruence between individual need-dispositions that develop through the socialization process and the role requirements of society (or other social systems) led in effect to a blurring of the distinction between subjective motives and objective social consequences. For example, given the mortality of human life, the long-term survival of society requires that its members be replaced through reproduction. Although people may reproduce and care for their children for a variety of personal reasons, their conscious motivations to do so probably do not include the long-range survival of society. Whether babies are born as a result of individuals' deliberate decisions to have children or are unplanned is itself an empirical question. But whatever their subjective personal motives may be, the objective outcome for society is the replenishment of its population.

The importance of unintended consequences can also be illustrated in the area of religious rituals. Individuals probably do not consider how rituals contribute to fulfilling the latent pattern maintenance function (to use Parsons' term) or enhancing social solidarity; instead, their motives may involve fulfilling their religious duties, honoring God, attaining salvation or peace of mind, or perhaps simply conforming to established customs. Of course, professional religious leaders are no doubt aware of how religious rituals increase social cohesion and other positive emotions, since they are involved in planning and orchestrating them. Although other people may also be aware of how participation with fellow believers in religious rituals helps reinforce their beliefs and moral commitments, it is an empirical question as to whether this actually motivates such participation or is a beneficial side effect. The distinction between subjective motives and objective social functions can be represented follows: Motive>Action>Function This distinction is reflected in Merton's contrast between manifest functions and latent functions. To quote, Manifest functions are those objective consequences contributing to the adjustment or adaptation of the system which are intended and recognized by participants in the system; latent functions, correlatively, [are] those which are neither intended nor recognized." (Merton, 1968:105)

Moreover, Merton warned, the outcomes of people's actions may sometimes be dysfunctional or "lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system." (Merton, 1968:105) Still a third alternative is that outcomes may be irrelevant as far as the survival or well-being of the system is concerned; in other words, they are nonfunctional, even though the behaviors contributing to these nonfunctional outcomes may meet individuals' personal needs or be maintained out of habit. In developing this paradigm Merton introduced several qualifications and exceptions to some of the implicit assumptions that seemed to underlie the functionalist perspective. Analysis of both functions and dysfunctions may involve either a short-term or long-term time frame. Although some actions may have short-term dysfunctional consequences, in other cases it may be a long time before dysfunctional consequences accumulate to the point where they are apparent or begin to undermine the system in a noticeable way. For example, some of the long-range dysfunctions of technological progress include increased pollution of the environment, depletion of natural resources, increased risk of nuclear accidents, and the threat of global warming. Questions regarding whether the social consequences of a given action are functional or dysfunctional, and in what time frame, are always empirical questions that cannot be settled by abstract a priori assumptions.

Lesson 09**Functionalism (Robert K. Merton-II)****Topic 34: Middle-range Functional Analysis**

Actions may also have multiple consequences for the numerous social systems in which they are embedded. These consequences must be identified and evaluated in terms of their functional significance for each system in which they are involved. The need to identify multiple outcomes is especially crucial in stratified and pluralistic societies in which actions that are beneficial for one group or segment of society may be harmful to other groups or segments of society. For example, installation of computerized robots in factory production or automated record systems in offices is no doubt functional for reducing labor costs and thus enhancing the profits of the owners, but these actions are dysfunctional for employees who lose their jobs. Similarly, labor strikes that result in high wage settlements are presumably functional for labor unions and the workers they represent, but dysfunctional for stockholders and consumers. Contemporary airport security procedures may be functional in terms of reducing the risk of terrorism and providing employment for security personnel, but dysfunctional in terms of increasing the routine hassles of air travel and reducing individual freedom. Similar questions regarding multiple and inconsistent consequences can be raised with regard to the functions of religion in society.

Labor strikes that result in high wage settlements are functional for labor but dysfunctional for stockholders and consumers. Airport security procedures: functional in terms of reducing the risk of terrorism and providing employment for security personnel, but dysfunctional in terms of increasing the routine hassles of air travel and reducing individual freedom. Multiple and inconsistent consequences with regard to the function of religion in society. Religion as major source of value consensus and social integration. If society divided along religious line, then religion loses its integration function. Religion undermines the overall social solidarity of society. Sectarianism. Solidarity within religious in-groups but conflict with religious out-groups. Plurality of religion may undermine the role of religion as a unifying force.

Functionalist claim: some “functional requirements” apply to society as a whole is challenged. Merton did not accede to such a claim. Action may have multiple and contradictory functions for different segments of society and different socioeconomic classes. An analysis limited to functional requirements for the overall society as a single system looks an inadequate model for how social systems work. There must be a net balance of functions over dysfunctions for a system to survive. Survival does not depend on some specific set of institutional patterns. Survival of system does not depend on some specific set of institutional patterns. Variety of ways could be developed for fulfilling the survival needs. Examples of numerous types of family forms, economy, polity, and religious orientations in different societies. Alternatives. Merton’s concept of functional alternatives comes into operation. No structure is indispensable. Whether or not the alternative structure fulfilled as effectively requires empirical investigation. Hence no over-arching theory of functionalism.

Topic 35-36 : Latent functions, Social problems, and Change

In Merton's perspective, functional analysis is definitely not limited to stability and social order. Institutional patterns may survive for reasons other than their contribution to the overall functional requirements of society, including the vested interests of influential or powerful groups in society. Or they may reflect the persistence of traditions and habits. At the societal level the ritualistic exchange of gifts and greetings during the Christmas/Hanukkah and New Year season may be explained in part as a well-established tradition, even though it may also include both functional and dysfunctional consequences. For example, increased consumer spending on gifts helps boost the economy, but some individuals may experience the strain of increased debt as a result. Everyday life routines such as evening television viewing or internet browsing might persist simply as habits, even though a sociological analysis could identify both functional and dysfunctional consequences of such patterns (such as beneficial individual relaxation versus decrease in family communication and solidarity, for example). If dysfunctional outcomes outweigh the positive functions, the adaptability of the overall system could be decreased, despite the benefits that may occur in the short run for particular groups.

The distinction between functional and dysfunctional consequences is useful when considered together with the distinction between manifest and latent functions. Numerous instances could be cited in which the manifest functions of some pattern of action or some institutional structure are intended to benefit the system (or a specific segment thereof), but unanticipated negative consequences emerge as an unfortunate byproduct, either for the same system or for some other related system. This notion of unintended negative consequences for others may be compared to the notion of "negative externalities" as identified in Coleman's rational choice theory.

Dysfunctional patterns may sometimes persist because their negative consequences are not (yet) recognized. However, when these latent dysfunctional consequences accumulate over time, they may eventually become manifest in people's consciousness as social problems about which people believe something should be done. Merton's concept of dysfunction is thus useful in developing a "functional" analysis of social problems and social change. For example, the problems of widespread environmental pollution or the risk of global warming as byproducts of industrial activity were not recognized in the early stages of industrial development, but are now seen by some groups as urgent problems requiring attention.

One consequence of efforts to deal with dysfunctions that become manifest is the establishment of regulations or programs leading to changes in people's behavior and perhaps some form of structural change. Many government agencies and programs can be seen as efforts to deal with the accumulations of dysfunctions that could no longer be ignored and so eventually were defined as social problems demanding some type of organized response. But these efforts to deal with newly recognized problems may eventually generate their own dysfunctional consequences, which may eventually stimulate additional structural change, and so on indefinitely. Moreover, the proliferation of complex government regulations and overlapping government agencies may generate additional dysfunctions in the form of decreased freedom, heavy financial cost, inhibition of individual initiative, and the like.

Numerous examples of unintended dysfunctions could be cited. For instance, although legislation to increase the minimum wage is intended to benefit those at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, an unanticipated byproduct of such legislation is that unemployment rates for the minimum wage segment of the labor market are likely to increase. This would result when employers increase their level of automation or decrease their level of services in order to avoid the increased labor costs. If investment in automated equipment increases, this may then generate positive consequences through expanded employment opportunities in a different (and probably higher paid) sector of the labor market, leading eventually to increases in productivity. Whether the positive consequences of higher minimum wages outweigh the negative consequences of higher unemployment on a long-term basis is a matter for systematic investigation and careful evaluation.

Focusing attention on the unanticipated dysfunctional consequences of social actions highlights a paradoxical dimension of social life that is often associated more with dialectical analysis than functional analysis (Schneider, 1975). The paradox involves the contradiction between subjective intentions and objective social consequences. This process is similar in some ways to the “perverse effects” that Boudon (1982) analyzed in the rational choice framework. As Boudon showed, individuals sometimes fail to achieve the positive outcomes they anticipate, even when their actions reflect their efforts to make rational choices, because they do not foresee how the rational choices that others make will have effects that combine with the outcomes of their own rational choices in generating widespread negative consequences for all. Boudon’s focus was individual outcomes rather than the overall welfare of the system, but of course the two levels are related.

Our emphasis so far has been on the unintended or latent dysfunctions or negative consequences resulting from human actions. However, the unintended byproducts may include benefits as well. For example, if members of a neighborhood get to know one another at their children’s Little League baseball games or community youth programs, this is likely to generate social capital which may subsequently lead to cooperative efforts to implement community improvement programs or deal with local problems that had previously been tolerated because no one was willing to get involved. The same positive outcome of increased social capital may also occur when members of the community are stimulated initially to cooperate by the need to deal with the appearance of local crises, such as a surge in unemployment or crime rates or increased traffic congestion. As people sometimes observe in everyday life, good outcomes can result from bad situations. On a broader level, the basic institutional structure of society and underlying patterns of social order can be seen in large part as latent outcomes of actions that are typically oriented toward more limited and personal ends. The advantage of functional analysis is that it looks beyond the motivations and intentions of individuals’ actions and focuses instead on the social consequences of these actions, particularly when combined with similar actions of others on a widespread basis. The interdependence among the actions of large numbers of people throughout society means that the outcomes of their actions may extend outward in unforeseen ways, affecting the lives of other people in both positive and negative ways as well as the overall welfare of society.

Merton’s strategy for functional analysis underscores the notion that individuals’ subjective orientations and conscious motives or intentions provide a limited picture of the dynamics of our social world. Human beings’ actions usually have far-reaching and long-lasting social consequences for their social world of which they may be unaware, some of which may undermine

their goals as well as have negative consequences for others or for the larger social system. These unintended and unanticipated effects become part of the environment to which they and others must subsequently adapt. The basic image of social life that emerges is that we experience ourselves living in a world that is beyond our control, with a design that is not of our own choosing, even though this world is actually one that we ourselves have created through our actions.

Topic 37: Social Structure and Anomie

Merton's theory of anomie and its effects in motivating deviant behavior is probably his most frequently cited middle-range theory (Merton, 1968:185–248). His basic contention is that various forms of deviant behavior in American society result from a discrepancy for some segments of the population between the material and occupational success goals that our culture emphasizes and the institutional means that are provided for achieving these goals. The American emphasis on equality and achievement (Parsons' universalistic achievement pattern) encourages all members of society to aspire to high levels of occupational and financial success, regardless of their social and economic class background. The stories of poor immigrants who gradually moved up the socioeconomic ladder in the American "land of opportunity" and the heroic status of successful "self-made" entrepreneurs express such ideals. But despite these culturally prescribed ambitions, opportunities for success are not equally distributed. Some segments of the population do not have access to the legitimate means for achieving these ends in culturally approved ways and so experience the frustrations of anomie. This discrepancy between goals and means is thus dysfunctional for those segments of the population that have internalized the culturally prescribed goals but lack the opportunities to achieve them through legitimate means. The result is often some form of deviant behavior.

Whether all forms of deviant behavior are dysfunctional for society is a separate question, however. Merton's theory has been widely used to explain crime and delinquency, in which case it is generally assumed that deviance is dysfunctional for society (and certainly for victims). However, some forms of deviant behavior, such as inventing a new product or providing a new kind of service, may be functional for society (or segments thereof) as well as for the innovative deviant. In addition, deviance may stimulate various forms of social change designed to improve the distribution of opportunities for success. However, it is beyond our purpose here to explore these issues regarding the various consequences of negative versus positive forms of deviance.

Lesson 10**Functionalism (Robert K. Merton-III)****Topic 38: Bureaucratic Personality**

Merton's analysis of the bureaucratic personality is another example of a counterproductive or dysfunctional consequence (Merton, 1968:249–261). As sociologists have recognized since Weber, bureaucratic organizations rely heavily on conformity to established rules and procedures to ensure the positive functions of continuity, reliability, and coordination in accomplishing their goals. However, Merton pointed out that this heavy reliance on rules may also be dysfunctional because it leads bureaucratic officials to emphasize conformity to the rules as an end in itself. The result is that these officials lose their capacity to adapt to new situations. In some cases, rigid adherence to rules may actually undermine the achievement of organizational goals, particularly when new situations develop that the rules are not designed to cover and the organizational culture fostered by the rules discourages flexibility and innovation. Whether conformity to established rules is functional or dysfunctional depends on the circumstances. In public organizations, often it is the clients who bear the brunt of bureaucratic rigidity as they encounter the unwillingness of bureaucratic officials to modify rules and regulations to fit individual needs.

Topic 39: Reference Group Theory

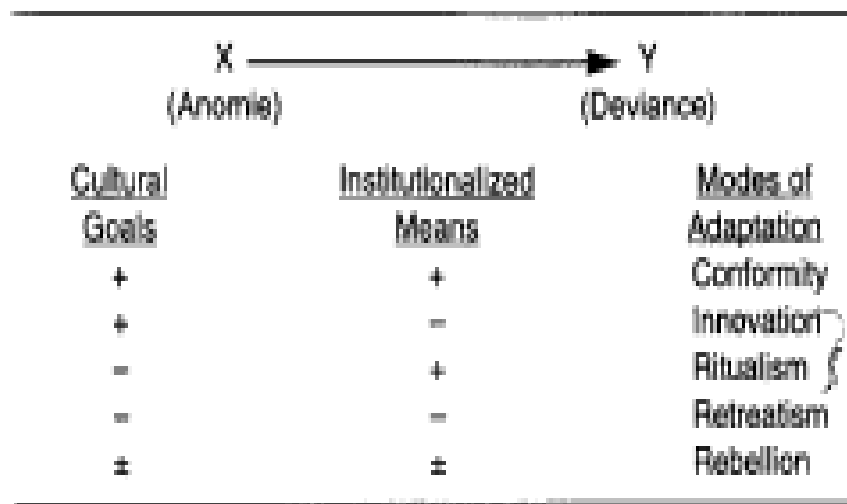
Still another example of a middle-range theory that draws on the strategy of functional analysis is reference group theory (Merton, 1968:279–334 [in collaboration with Alice Rossi]; 335–440). Reference groups are the groups with which an individual identifies as a basis for self-evaluation, comparison, and normative guidance. The idea that individuals' self-concepts and attitudes are derived from the group(s) with which they identify is consistent with Mead's concept of the "generalized other." Also, the insight that individuals' level of satisfaction with their current situation is based on comparisons with others is used in exchange theory to explain how people evaluate their reward/cost outcomes and either maintain or change their relationships.

Merton pointed out that individuals are sometimes oriented toward the standards and normative patterns of groups to which they do not currently belong. This sometimes helps to account for deviance from the normative patterns of groups to which they do belong. Although this may undermine solidarity and thus be dysfunctional for a particular group, it may be quite functional in an open society in encouraging people to devote themselves to the kind of effort that will lead to upward socioeconomic mobility. When individuals identify with a group that they expect to join someday, their eventual transition to the new group may be facilitated by their prior identification with it. Thus this process is functional by encouraging and promoting anticipatory socialization (Merton, 1968:316–329).

Topic 40: Theory of deviance

Though Merton's contributions to sociology are legion, his theory of deviance, which has been reprinted several times in different languages, is one of his best-known. In developing his theory of deviance, Merton utilizes explanatory factors that are typical of functional analysis, namely; cultural goals and institutionalized norms. He uses anomie as a major

independent variable; as we saw above, anomie is a term also used by Durkheim to explain suicide, a form of deviance. Let us recall that Durkheim's general definition of anomie was a lack of regulation, or norm-lessness. Merton's definition differs somewhat; for him, anomie is a discontinuity between cultural goals and the legitimate means available for reaching them. He applies this analysis to the United States, where the goal of monetary success is heavily emphasized but there is no corresponding emphasis on the "legitimate avenues to march toward this goal." The resulting anomie is, Merton argues, dysfunctional for American society in general and especially dysfunctional for those groups within the country who lack the means to reach the goal of monetary success. Thus, it is a source of strain for the system, in the Parsonian sense, and it leads to a considerable amount of deviance.



In depicting his model graphically Merton chose to use a plus sign (to indicate acceptance of the goal of monetary success and/or the means to reach the goal, and he used a minus sign (-) to indicate the rejection (or unavailability) of the goal or means to reach it. He thus arrives at five modes of adaptation, or types of deviance. Our schematic presentation differs from Merton's original one in that we have presented it with the relationship between the goal and means (his independent variable, anomie) first, followed by the modes of adaptation, or deviance typology (his dependent variable).

We can dispose of the mode of conformity very easily, for a person who attains monetary success by working hard and getting an education is the prototype of the successful American. Next, we can see that innovation (for example, racketeering) and ritualism (the type we mentioned earlier in discussing the Balchen case) are the only pure cases of anomie as Merton defined it, because in both of these there is discontinuity between the goals and means. Retreatism (for example, drug addiction) is a rejection (or unavailability) of both monetary success and the means to it, and rebellion is a combination of a rejection of societal goals and means and a substitution of other goals and means.

Merton's prediction for the United States, where monetary success is highly valued and the legitimate means to it are unavailable for many, is that our society should have a lot of deviance and that it should most likely occur among the lower classes, who experience the structural blockages most keenly. In general his model is not clear, however, about when the various types will emerge or in what degree. Although Merton did not test his hypotheses on deviance himself, they were stated empirically enough to guide other researchers, and it has been said that the publication of this essay on deviance in 1938 in the American Sociological Review established Merton "once and for all as a major figure in Sociology.

Lesson 11**Neo-Functionalism (Topic 41-44)****Topic 41-44: Neo-Functionalism**

Neo-functionalism is a recent theoretical development that emerged in the mid-1980s, both in the United States and in Germany. In 1984, the American Sociological Association devoted two sessions to a conference on neofunctionalism at its annual meeting, where most of the papers presented were reappraisals and reconsiderations of the empirical implications of Parsonian theory.

These papers were subsequently edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander, the leading proponent of neofunctionalism in the United States. In the introduction to Neofunctionalism, he suggests three similarities between neofunctionalism and neo-Marxism. Both include a critique of some of the basic tenets of the original theory, the incorporation of elements from antagonistic theoretical traditions, and a variety of competing developments, rather than a single coherent form. Alexander then argues that neofunctionalism is a tendency rather than a developed theory, and he elaborates on the various tendencies of neofunctionalism: (1) to create a form of functionalism that is multidimensional and includes micro as well as macro levels of analysis; (2) to push functionalism to the left and reject Parsons' optimism about modernity; (3) to argue for an implicit democratic thrust in functional analysis; (4) to incorporate a conflict orientation; and (5) to emphasize contingency (uncertainty) and interactional creativity.

What remains at issue among neo-functionalists, however, are the following kinds of interrelated problems: How may researchers best characterize the relationship between conflict or contingency and social order? To what extent must Parsons' emphasis upon the relationship between social action and social order be reformulated in order to inform empirical research? Alexander refuses to predict whether a "school" of neofunctionalism will actually emerge. Nonetheless, he views the movement to reappropriate Parsons as gaining momentum, and he is of the opinion that a critically revived Parsonian tradition should continue. Current contributors to neo-functionalism, in addition to Alexander, include Dean Gerstein, Mark Gould, Paul Colomy, Frank Lechner, and David Sciulli in the United States and Niklas Luhmann and Richard Munch in Germany. The American reconsideration of Parsons will stand or fall, however, on the quality and quantity of empirical research informed by neofunctionalism in the next decade.

Recently, Alexander proclaimed that the anti-Parsonian period is over, because the battle was won in 1980.¹⁵¹ Why did the anti-Parsonians win? He replies that the "challengers" (e.g., conflict, exchange, interaction, ethnomethodology, and Marxist theory) picked on significant issues, pointed up weaknesses in Parsons' theory, and thus eclipsed functionalism. Alexander's view is that today we are in a new post-Parsonian phase of sociological theorizing—a synthesizing movement—which is attempting to make the link between macro sociological and micro sociological theories. Alexander states that among the theorists of this new generation involved in the synthesizing movement, "some pay a great deal of attention to Parsons, others do not. Still, theirs is exactly the same course that long ago Parsons set for himself: to end the 'warring schools' by developing a synthetic theory which incorporates the partial theories of the day."

German theorists, on the other hand, tend to read Parsons through the eyes of Niklas Luhmann, who spent a year in the early 1960s at Harvard studying under Parsons. Luhmann views Parsons' theory as a milestone because it "has been the only attempt to begin with a number of equally important functions and then to give a theoretical deduction to them No one else has dared to try this or even thought it was possible." However, what Parsons' theory is missing, according to Luhmann, are the concepts of self-reference and complexity. His own work is an attempt to formulate a universal or "grand" theory of social systems which incorporates these concepts. Luhmann argues that a social system exists "whenever the actions of several persons are meaningful, interrelated and are thus ... marked off from an environment." A social system thus emerges whenever any interaction takes place among individuals. According to Luhmann, there are three types of social systems: interaction systems (face-to-face interaction of human beings), organization systems (where membership is linked to specific conditions), and societal systems (the all-embracing social system, entire societies). Self-reference, according to Luhmann, is a condition for the efficient functioning of systems. It means that the system is able to observe itself, can reflect on itself and what it is doing, and can make decisions as a result of this reflection. Self-referential systems have the ability to "delineate their self identities." They can describe themselves by setting up boundaries regarding what they are and what they are not; in other words, the system has "structural autonomy."

Self-referencing, in Luhmann's view, takes place in all subsystems, such as politics, science, economy, family, education, and law. He provides us with an example of the self-referencing of a system when he says that the scientific subsystem "reflects on itself in fundamental theorizing and in its decisions to continue or discontinue its historically given traditions."

"Self-referential systems are not only self-organizing or self-regulating systems They exist as a closed network of the production of elements which reproduces itself as a network by continuing to produce the elements which are needed to continue to produce the elements."

To argue that a system is self-referencing is to confer on the system a capability for decision making. How much is gained by such a reification? It is one thing to suggest, as Parsons does, that a system has "needs," but quite another to say that it can "reflect on itself" and "make decisions." It seems to us that an example such as the one given above confuses the issue even further. After all, the scientific subsystem that "reflects on itself" consists, in the last analysis, of groups of scientists who do the reflecting and make the decisions.

Luhmann's position, however, is that the human subject or concrete social groups should not be the central point of social thought. Societal systems, according to Luhmann, are too complicated to be treated in this way. They cannot be treated as composed of human beings, but rather as being composed of communication units. Individuals, then, are merely part of the environment of the societal system. Subjective meaning is ruled out, as evidenced in his statement that "there is no plausible way to base systems theory on a Weberian concept of meaningful action."

In Luhmann's theory, the chief task performed by social systems is to reduce complexity. Luhmann is convinced that Parsons' theory of action offers "only meager resources for handling complexity" and that "a theory of society will have to concern itself with ideas such as the reduction of the extreme complexity and contingency of the world." In Luhmann's view, greater complexity brings more choices, more possibilities, and this means that choosing among alternatives is more difficult; it takes more no's to reach a yes. Think, for example,

of the difficult decision arising from those technological innovations which have produced an enormous variety of software programs for computers. How does one choose a word-processing program, for instance, when newer and more sophisticated versions are being introduced almost daily? Luhmann argues that the fundamental problem of such a paradoxical world can be "solved," or "transformed into minor problems," by religion or by several functional equivalents of religion in modern society, including art, love, sovereign power, and making money. What these alternatives have in common is that they provide at least some actors with shared standards of action accepted on faith. They allow complex sets of interactions to proceed in a world that would otherwise be chaotic and incomprehensible.

Luhmann is basically not as optimistic about the future as was Parsons. Luhmann argues that the modern world is too complex for shared norms or even value generalization, and he criticizes Parsons for overestimating not only the social consensus that is functionally necessary but also the consensus that exists in actuality. What unites us, according to Luhmann, is "common acceptance of schematized [or structural] contingency."

However, in our view there is little attraction to the idea of the world being united by a situation of unpredictability. How can groups be socially integrated simply by experiencing the same uncertainties?

In a later work, Luhmann points to the negative aspects (dysfunctions) of modernity. He views society as confronted with the full consequences of its structural selections, such as the ecological problems resulting from its own "rationality." Luhmann also points to the growing awareness of and anxiety about global risks nourished by modern ecological problems and the struggle to maintain the level of social welfare. In fact, Luhmann describes this as the "era of unmasked anxiety."

In a more recent book entitled *Risk: A Sociological Theory*, Luhmann defines risk as a potential harm threatening an individual that is based on a decision made by the individual. If it is a calculation regarding potential loss and advantage in terms of time, like deciding whether or when or where to dispose of nuclear materials, or to light up a cigarette and have a smoke.

In this analysis, Luhmann makes a distinction between risk and danger, the latter defined as a potential harm to which an individual is passively exposed, that is, without that particular individual having made a decision to do so; for example, a tornado, earthquake, or hurricane. In the case of danger, he explains, "the possible loss is caused externally, that is to say, it is attributed to the environment."

Luhmann also argues that one individual's decision (risk) can be another individual's danger, like the smoker's effect on the nonsmoker. Thus, the critical difference between the decision makers and the people affected by the decision is that what is a risk for one (the decision maker) is a danger for the other (the one affected).

Returning to his focus on communication units, Luhmann poses the question of how communication that seeks to raise the level of risk awareness must be constituted. He points to warnings against risks in product advertising, and includes under that heading "the multifarious efforts to influence sexual behavior in the face of the AIDS risk."

Whereas people in primitive societies were threatened primarily by dangers, Luhmann argues that the technological society makes decisions that affect the environment in a profound way, like decisions regarding nuclear power generation. In Luhmann's view, we are primarily threatened today by risks over which we have only partial control as individuals because of the complexity of decision making. Thus he sees modern society as risk-prone. Luhmann states, "Modern risk-oriented society is a product not only of the perception of the consequences of technological achievement. Its seed is contained in the expansion of research possibilities and of knowledge itself." The carcinogenic effects of X-rays, which only became apparent after use of the new technology, is one of the consequences of technological achievement mentioned by Luhmann.

Luhmann's work and the work of Richard Munch have spearheaded the revival of functionalist theorizing in Germany. Like neo-Marxism, the development of neofunctionalism, both in Germany and in America, involves a critique and a reinterpretation of the original work, rather than an attempt to repeat the debates of the 1950s and 1960s.

Conclusion

In discussing the characteristics of functionalism and the contributions of the major theorists throughout this chapter, we have raised questions about certain features of the functionalist perspective. This was not done to discourage the reader from making use of the insights of functionalism. Rather, it was an attempt to uncover the weaknesses as well as the strengths of this perspective, and this, as we mentioned earlier, is one of our goals in writing this text.

As a matter of fact, those who prefer other perspectives could, nonetheless profit by a more thorough knowledge and understanding of functionalism than is common among many contemporary sociologists. The perspective provides considerable insights into how societies work and why institutions and customs exist. If there is some wisdom in the saying, "You have to know the system to beat the system," then functionalism can help those who are dedicated to radical social change to a fuller understanding of how the system operates. Nor, to appreciate functionalism, need one take sides with Parsons when, for instance, he argues that his general theory of action encompasses conflict theory, and thus there are not two theories, but one. One may, instead, agree with Dahrendorf or Coser, who see consensus (or functionalist) theory and conflict theory as two different sides of the coin.

Does the assumption that consensus lies at the basis of any social order make this theory ideologically conservative? In arguing that functionalism is independent of any ideological implications, Parsons argues that functional analysis has "nothing to do with political conservatism or a defense of the status quo." In the past, however, functionalism has often been used as a conservative approach to the analysis of society because strain and conflict were seen as dysfunctional for the social system attracted to functionalism tended, in practice, to be more or less satisfied with the present system, and they were not neutral about its survival. However, with the revitalization of functionalist theorizing in the 1980s and the critique and reinterpretation of Parsons by neofunctionalists through the 1990s, we expect to continue to see some new developments and extensions of this perspective.

To summarize, then, functionalism tends to stress values over interests, and although it shows the independent importance of ideas and the links between power and social consent,

it neglects the coercive aspects of power and the significance of people's conflicting objectives. Similarly, it emphasizes social control over social change, thus analyzing adjustive but ignoring disruptive change and overemphasizes the importance of security and the "needs" of society at the expense of interests and objectives that cannot be met without social change. In general, functionalism also stresses structure over process, (although Parsons' work on evolutionary change takes into account processes as well as structures); and in general, functionalism stresses macrostructural over micro interactional sociological analysis.

Its macro sociological emphasis means that one is taking an aerial view of society when one views society from the functionalist perspective. It is not a "better" picture than that taken from the ground where individuals are interacting; it is simply a picture taken from a different angle. If we consider, for instance, the locations of the numerous television cameras at a political convention, we realize that each camera captures a piece of the reality but that no one camera by itself catches all of the action. So it is, we argue, with theoretical perspectives in sociology. In functionalism, most of the pictures are taken from on high, focusing on social structures, and most of the pictures are developed as "stills." Nonetheless, a part of the total reality is contained in those pictures. In the following chapters, we shall see how other perspectives both challenge and differ from functionalism by emphasizing interests and change, the dynamic processes of individual behavior, and the "close-up" view of social interactions.

Lesson 12**Conflict Perspective (Topic 45-47)****Topic45: Conflict Perspective**

Conflict theory is the major alternative to functionalism as an approach to analyzing the general structure of societies; and it is increasingly popular and important in modern sociology. It is also a less unified perspective than the others discussed in this book, and the disagreements among its proponents are often more bitter than those they have with theorists who use other approaches. However, conflict theorists of all types share a number of important assumptions and preconceptions. Together these create a distinctive way of looking at the world.

Functionalists, as we have seen, look at societies and social institutions as systems in which all the parts depend on each other and work together to create equilibrium. They do not deny the existence of conflict; but they believe society develops ways to control it, and it is these methods that they analyze. Conflict theorists' perceptions of society could hardly be more different. Where functionalists see interdependence and unity in society, conflict theorists see an arena in which groups fight for power, and the "control" of conflict simply means that one group is able, temporarily, to suppress its rivals. Functionalists see civil law, for example, as a way of increasing social integration, whereas conflict theorists see civil law as a way of defining and upholding a particular order that benefits some groups at the expense of others.

We can see how very different a view of things this perspective creates if we go back to the example we used in introducing functionalism—a modern airport. A functionalist perspective points out the way the different parts of an airport work together to keep the system functioning. Conflict theory is interested in the rivalries among different workers and management and in the position each group is in to do well for itself. A conflict theorist might point out that the air controllers want more staff and additional expensive equipment; that the pilots are continually trying to restrict entry into the profession in order to keep salaries high; that the porters, maintenance staff, and cleaners all belong to militant unions; and that all these groups are at odds with the airlines and terminal management, who want to keep costs down and profits up. The focus is on the shifting balance of power among competing groups, not on the equilibrium of interdependence and cooperation.

This general "conflict" orientation incorporates three central and connected assumptions. The first is that people have a number of basic "interests," things they want and attempt to acquire and which are not defined by societies but are rather common to them all. Conflict theorists are not always explicit about this view of mankind, but it is present in all their work. Second, and central to the whole conflict perspective, is an emphasis on power as the core of social relationships. Conflict theorists always view power not only as scarce and unequally divided—and therefore a source of conflict—but also as essentially coercive. This analysis leads, in turn, to a concern with the distribution of those resources that give people more or less power. For example, any conflict theorist would consider what happened to the American Indians to have been inevitable. The white settlers had greater numbers, greater wealth, and more advanced weapons; therefore, they were bound, such a theorist would argue, to seize lands and mineral wealth and give little in return. What is surprising, from a conflict perspective, is not that the settlers' religion and political beliefs did not stop them, but that the Indians were not simply exterminated.

The third distinctive aspect of conflict theory is that values and ideas are seen as weapons used by different groups to advance their own ends rather than as means of defining a whole society's identity and goals. We shall find that conflict theorists have a great deal to say about ideas as an aspect of groups' interests, especially under the categories of "ideology" and "legitimacy." In the case of America's treatment of the Indians, for example, conflict theorists would tend to interpret the notion of America's "manifest destiny" and the idea of "civilizing" the tribes as clear examples of how people develop ideas that suit their own interests.

The Two Traditions

The basic elements of conflict theory which we have described are common to all its proponents, but conflict theory can also be divided into two quite dissimilar traditions. These differ, above all, in their view of social science and in whether they believe that conflict can ever be eradicated. This chapter will discuss each separately.

The first group of theorists believes social scientists have a moral obligation to engage in a critique of society. It refuses to separate-or to admit that one can really separate-analysis from judgment or fact from value. Theorists in this group also often (but not always) believe that in principle a society could exist in which there were no longer grounds for social conflict. The second group, by contrast, considers conflict to be an inevitable and permanent aspect of social life; it also rejects the idea that social science's conclusions are necessarily value-laden. Instead, its proponents are interested in establishing a social science with the same canon of objectivity as informs the natural sciences.

Theorists in the first group, where we will discuss modern Marxism and neo-Marxism, Habermas and his Frankfurt School forerunners, C Wright Mills, and Pierre Bourdieu are most influenced by the work of Karl Marx. In the second group, where we describe the work of Ralf Dahrendorf, Lewis Coser, and Randall Collins, Marx's influence is still apparent, but the most important continuities are with the writings of Max Weber. We therefore turn now to a discussion of the roots of modern conflict theory in the work of these two classical thinkers, as well as to the influence of such writers as Veblen, Schumpeter, Simmel, the European elite theorists, and the American sociologists of the Chicago School.

Topic 46-47: Intellectual Roots

Power, Position, and Legitimacy: Marx and Weber

The basic elements of conflict theory were set out by two of the greatest early sociologists, Karl Marx and Max Weber. Much of Weber's work incorporates a debate with Marx and Marxist analysis, but in both these authors we find the same two concerns: first, with the way social positions bestow more or less power on their incumbents; and second, with the role of ideas in creating or undermining the legitimacy of a social position.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) Conflict theory in sociology is the creation of Karl Marx. Indeed, Marxism and conflict theory are sometimes discussed as though the two were synonymous. There can also be no better example than Marxism of the close connection between a theorist's ideas and the events of the "real world"; for it is in the name of Marx's ideas that

revolutionaries around the world attack existing forms of society and that organized Communist parties have ruled a large part of mankind.

Karl Marx was born in 1818 in Trier, Germany. His parents were Jews who had converted to Protestantism to avoid discrimination and loss of civil rights, and in particular, to protect his father's law practice. Marx also began to study law. However, at the University of Berlin he became fascinated by the philosophy of Hegel, who interpreted the whole of history as the process by which "Spirit" (and consequently humanity) progressed toward complete self-knowledge and a "rational" and "free" society. Marx became a Young Hegelian, one of a group of young philosophers who questioned many parts of the master's teachings while remaining beholden to his approach. Indeed, in later years, Marx came to see his own writing as upending Hegel's, replacing Hegel's emphasis on mind as the crucial determinant of history with his own "materialist" philosophy, which demonstrated that material factors determined events. He also became an antireligious radical, and after completing his thesis he worked as a writer and publicist in Paris and Belgium. During this period he wrote *The Communist Manifesto*, which sets out a program for a revolutionary government and outlines his theory of social structures and social change. When the revolution of 1848 broke out in Germany, he returned to edit a radical newspaper. After the revolution failed, he went into exile again and settled in London, his home for the rest of his life.

During much of this period, Marx and his family were extremely poor; help from his friend Friedrich Engels, a socialist textile manufacturer, was vital. Nonetheless, his theories became increasingly well-known and influential, especially outside England. He was consulted more and more frequently by Russian and German radicals and revolutionaries, and since his death, Communist parties have developed all over the world. Their dogma consists of the analyses of Marx and of Lenin, who led the first successful Communist revolution. Because Marx's work is still used by so many writers in their analyses of contemporary society, we discuss it in additional detail later in the chapter. Of course, the ideas of many other long-dead writers are essential to contemporary analyses, but Marx's work is rather different. Marxist sociologists form a school whose analyses take place within the framework Marx created. In this sense, therefore, Marxism is an entirely contemporary theory.

The basic elements of conflict theory are all apparent in Marx's work. He believed, first of all, that people have an essential nature and predefined interests. Indeed, Marxists generally argue that if people do not behave in accordance with these interests it can only mean that they have been deceived about what their "true interests" are by a social system that works in others' favor. Second, Marx analyzed both historical and contemporary society in terms of conflicts between different social groups with different interests. Finally, he emphasized the link between the nature of ideas or "ideologies" and the interests of those who develop them, and he insisted that the ideas of an age reflect the interests of the "ruling class."

Marx emphasized the primacy of technology and of patterns of property ownership in determining the nature of people's lives and course of social conflict. Whereas Marxist and, to a lesser degree, other "critical" conflict theorists retain this emphasis, other analysts from Weber on have seen it as an important, but only partial, explanation. Marx's work is also distinguished by its claim to predict the future and its belief in the possibility of a perfect, conflict-free,

communist society. Such beliefs are accepted partly or in full by the more "critical" theorists, while being rejected by the analytic conflict theorists who draw on Weber. The divide between the two approaches thus derives from the central differences between Marx and Weber themselves.

Max Weber (1864-1920) Max Weber was born into a prominent bourgeois German family. His father was an important member of the National Liberal Party, with a seat in the Reichstag (Parliament); his mother came from a wealthy but also intensely religious and cultured background. There was considerable tension in his parents' marriage. As a youth, Weber tended to identify with his father. However, during his post-student years, when he was still financially dependent and living at home, he came to resent the older man and his authoritarian behavior. These conflicts played an important part in the complete breakdown Weber suffered in his early thirties.

Before and after this period, Weber was enormously productive, both in his intellectual work and in political activities. He held chairs at the universities of Freiburg and Heidelberg and produced a range of works on topics which included economic policy, political development, the social psychology of industrial work, the sociology of religion, economic history, and the methodology of social science. At the same time, he played an important role in Christian-Social political circles, producing papers on current issues. During this period his home was a center of German intellectual life.

The last years of Weber's life were also those of the First World War, of German defeat, of revolution and virtual civil war at home, and of the establishment of a German Republic. During this period Weber was intensely involved in politics. After initially supporting the war, he later urged peace overtures and called for widespread changes in the German political structure. He was a founding member of the Deutsche Demokratische Partei and was involved in writing the new constitution. But he also called the abortive 1918 revolution a "bloody carnival," something the left wing never forgave and which doomed proposals to have him join the government or become a candidate for president of the Republic.

For all his lifelong concern with the relationship between politics and intellectual thought, Weber had none of the utopian prophet about him. Like Marx, Weber wanted to identify the origins of essential characteristics of "modern" society, but he did not see modernization as the road to perfection. On the contrary: modern rationality could be an "iron cage," creating a narrow "disenchanted" world of bureaucratic officialdom.

Weber's analyses are complex and difficult to categorize, and they have had none of Marx's impact on the world. Nonetheless, a very large proportion of non-Marxist intellectuals would nominate him as the greatest of sociologists, and his ideas are the single most important influence on "analytic" conflict theory. He is also of great importance to some of the younger sociologists in the "critical" tradition, most especially Jurgen Habermas. As we discuss below, much of Habermas' work on modernity and rationalization needs to be read as an ongoing debate with Max Weber.

Like Marx, Weber saw people's activities as largely self-interested. However, he believed that a historian or sociologist must recognize, in addition to such universal interests as the acquisition of wealth, the importance of goals and values specific to a society. For example, he suggested that the Calvinists' desire to save their souls found expression in the unique

goal of simply accumulating wealth. This was seen as evidence of God's favor, whereas actually enjoying its fruits would be sinful indulgence.

Weber analyzed the way people maneuver in pursuit of advantage in terms of both particular values and circumstances and more general socio- logical categories. He formulated ideal types by abstracting from different historical contexts the essential elements of a general concept. Real-life examples need not correspond exactly to the stylized ideal type: for example, it may be impossible to find any examples of bureaucracy which correspond in every particular to Weber's model of it. However, an ideal type is very important in making historical and contemporary events intelligible. For example, Weber argues that an essential element of modern bureaucracies is that they are organized around written documents ("the files") and around fixed rules which define precisely what officials can and cannot do. American and Chinese bureaucracies may differ in certain ways because of general differences between the two countries. But insofar as both are examples of the ideal bureaucratic type, we can see that they will also be alike in crucial ways, including how they deal with the public. Weber was very concerned with power and with the ways in which some people secure domination over others. He distinguished between unlegitimated domination and legitimated domination, which has authority, and involves claims that certain people have the right to be obeyed. He suggested that there are three main foundations for successful claims to authority-or three "ideal types."

Charismatic authority rests on a leader's personal qualities, so that "the governed submit because of their belief in the extraordinary quality of the specific person ... The legitimacy of charismatic rule thus rests upon the belief in magical powers, revelations and hero worship."! Thus, Jesus' disciples followed him because of what he was, not because of some position which he held.

Traditional authority is also personal, but it is enjoyed because it has been handed down from the past. A king or a tribal chief may not personally be very capable or effective, but he enjoys authority legitimated by custom. Weber argues that in general "patriarchalism is by far the most important type of domination the legitimacy of which rests upon tradition.

Patriarchalism means the authority of the rather, the nusoano, me senior the house; ... the rule of the master and patron ... of the lord over the domestic servants and household officials ... of the patrimonial lord and sovereign prince Finally, rational-legal authority is derived from formal rules. Thus, modern bureaucrats are obeyed because and insofar as statutes empower them to do certain things and because our societies accept statutory laws as the ultimate source of authority. According to Weber, the anchoring of legitimacy in particular sorts of rules is central to modern society's ongoing "rationalization" of everything.

Weber did not disagree with Marx's view that economic interests often underlie people's behavior, even when not acknowledged. However, he believed Marx to be wrong in identifying economic characteristics as the sole crucial determinant of both social structure and people's chances in life. Someone's religion, education, or political faction may, he argued, be as important a source of power and success. Instead of relying on Marx's cate- gory of class, Weber distinguished among classes, status groups, and par- ties, all of which could be more or less important for people's lives and serve as foci of group organization and conflict. By a class, he meant people who shared the same position in economic life, whether this involved property, as in Marx's definition, or marketable skills. A party he defined as an association that exists to "secure power within a corporate group for its leaders in order to attain ideal or material advantages for its active members."? Examples include political

parties seeking power in the modern state but also the factions that fought for control of Rome or the Italian city-states. Finally, status groups, as Weber's term *Stände* is generally translated, are groups whose distinctiveness lies not in their shared economic position but either in their shared mode of life—often founded on a common education—or in the prestige attached to their birth and family, as in the case of a hereditary aristocracy.

Weber's argument has had great influence on modern "analytic" theorists who, like him, believe that economic factors are not always the major determinants of people's lives and power. His influence is also apparent in these theorists' discussion of the relationship between ideas and power. It is important to emphasize that unlike Marx, Weber believed ideas and values to have an important, independent effect on history (as in the case of Calvinism and Confucianism) and did not consider them to be simply reflections of underlying interests. At the same time, he was aware of the role they could play in strengthening the position of a social group or a given social order. He emphasized, in particular, the importance of "legitimacy," the belief that someone's position and the system incorporating it are right and proper. This concept recurs in and influences much of modern conflict analysis.

Lesson 13**Conflict Perspective: Ralf Dahrendorf-I (Topic 48-52)****Topic 48: Ralf Dahrendorf Introduction**

Ralf Dahrendorf (1929) has for many years been widely known and respected in both Europe and North America. As a teenager in Nazi Germany, he was sent to a concentration camp for his membership in a high-school group opposing the state, and he has continued to be deeply involved in political affairs. He has been a Free Democratic member of the Baden-Württemberg Landtag (Regional Parliament) and the West German Bundestag (Parliament). As a member of the Commission of the European Communities, he has been responsible for external relations and for education, science, and research.

Dahrendorf has worked as an academic in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. From 1974 to 1984 he was director of the London School of Economics, one of the most prestigious British institutions of higher education. In 1984, he returned to Germany for a while, as professor of sociology at the University of Constance. He is now in England once again, as warden of St. Anthony's College, Oxford University, and sits in the British House of Lords, as a life peer, Lord Dahrendorf.

Dahrendorf's work on conflict reveals two major concerns. The first is with what he himself describes as "theories of society,"²¹⁸ that is, with setting out the general principles of social explanation. Here, Dahrendorf stresses the primacy of power and the consequent inevitability of conflict. Like Marx, his second concern is with the determinants of active conflict—the ways social institutions systematically generate groups with conflicting interests and the circumstances in which such groups will become organized and active.

Topic 49-50: Power, conflict, and social explanation

There is, Dahrendorf argues, an inherent tendency to conflict in society. Those groups with power will pursue their interests, and those without power will pursue theirs. The interests of the two are necessarily different. Sooner or later, he argues—and in some systems the powerful may be very thoroughly entrenched—the balance between power and opposition shifts, and society changes. Thus, conflict is "the great creative force of human history."

Power According to Dahrendorf's theory of society, the distribution of power is the crucial determinant of social structure. His definition of power is Weber's: "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests." In this view, the essence of power is the control of sanctions, which enables those who possess power to give orders and obtain what they want from the powerless. However, people dislike submission. Therefore, Dahrendorf argues, there is inevitably a conflict of interest and an impetus for the powerless to conflict with the powerful, the former in pursuit of power, the latter in defense of it. Power is a "lasting source of friction."

This essentially coercive view of power, which is common to most conflict theorists, is very different from that of functionalism. As we have seen, Parsons believes that power is embodied in political institutions that solve the "functional imperative" of goal attainment. The ability power bestows to get what one wants at others' expense he regards as a "secondary and derived"

phenomenon. Dahrendorf's view is the opposite. Power is necessary if large organizations are to achieve their goals; and at times, such as in a defensive war, the powerful may carry out very clearly the common aims of a group. However, what Parsons considers the secondary aspect of power, Dahrendorf considers primary: the powerful are not granted power by the community to carry out some "common will," but grasp and use that power for their own ends.

Dahrendorf does not see the struggle for power as the sum of social life, however. Weber's (and Dahrendorf's) definition of power includes actors "within a social relationship," that is, in situations where other people's actions matter. But there are also times when people are free to do what they like without other people mattering at all. In his recent lectures on the current political situation in the West, Dahrendorf has discussed the factors that endow societies with more or less "liberty" in this sense—with what has been called "negative freedom." In America, for example, you are "at liberty" to move from one city to another without anyone's permission. In China you are not, and whether you get the requisite permission and papers largely depends on your own "power" and influence.

Norms Like other conflict theorists, Dahrendorf argues that societal norms do not define or emerge from social consensus. Conflict theory, he argues, perceives, unlike functionalism, that norms "are established and maintained ... by power, and their substance may well be explained in terms of interests of the powerful." This may be seen from the fact that norms are backed by sanctions. Vivid examples of what Dahrendorf means can be found in China, where dissidents still risk prison or labor camp, or in the pre-civil rights South, where so-called "uppity" blacks or nonconforming whites could lose their livelihoods or even their lives. In turn, sanctions involve the control and use of power, particularly the power of law and punishment. "In the last analysis, established norms are nothing but ruling norms," he suggests.

Social Stratification Dahrendorf clearly distinguishes between two facts: first, that positions and jobs are different and demand different skills, and second, that different jobs are treated as "superior" or "inferior" to one another. There are both "social differentiation of positions ... and social stratification based on reputation and wealth and expressed in a rank order of social status." Social stratification is what makes college presidents more generally respected than bus drivers and lies behind claims that teachers "ought" to be paid more than maintenance men. Stratification, Dahrendorf argues, is caused by norms, which categorize some things as desirable and others as not. In every group, norms defining how people should behave entail discrimination against those who do not comply. During the Vietnam War, for example, those who supported the war were ostracized on some campuses, those who opposed it on others. In some adolescent groups, drug use and criminal behavior may be the norm, while in others drug use is viewed as a sign of personal weakness. Moreover, every society has general norms, which define certain characteristics as good (such as being an aristocrat or having more education than average) and which therefore entail discrimination against those who do not or cannot conform. These norms, Dahrendorf argues, are the basis of social stratification, and they themselves are derived from and upheld by power. Once again, therefore, power is the central concept.

This is a very different explanation from that of functionalists, who argue that social stratification derives from society's need to attract talented people into important positions. The two may not be as totally irreconcilable as Dahrendorf implies, however. Dahrendorf does not explain how a

group becomes powerful in the first place, but this will surely often depend, at least in part, on its offering skills and a type of social order that people value. Not all successful ruling groups are military invaders! It is precisely the existence of a relationship between power and general social values that functionalism addresses. Similarly, economics' statement that income differentials are a result of the market value of skills has given rise to theories of stratification linking success with provision of scarce services. However, a group that gains a hold on power in this way will almost certainly strive to maintain and take advantage of its position, convince everyone of its legitimacy and importance, and prevent competition from groups with different potential power bases-and Dahrendorf's approach is far better suited than functionalism's to analyzing this process.

Topic 51-52: Theory of conflict groups

In his best-known work, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, Dahrendorf addresses the question of when inequalities and conflicting interests will actually produce conflicts. His central argument is that social conflicts will take place, systematically, among groups that differ in the authority they enjoy over others. By authority, Dahrendorf (again following Weber) means the sort of power that is attached to a social role or position that is legitimate in the sense of being defined and delimited by social norms, and that is backed by sanctions up to (and no further than) these limits. A university, for example, has the authority to charge you for your courses, board, and lodging, but not to take all your money. A mugger has the power to do just that-but no authority at all to do so.

Dahrendorf's position is that the stable and recurrent patterns of institutional authority systematically give rise to social conflict between those who have some degree of authority and those who have none. In a departure from conventional "economic" usage, Dahrendorf labels these groups classes. He writes that "the term 'class' signifies conflict groups that are generated by the differential distribution of authority in imperatively coordinated associations," that is, organizations in which orders are given and taken. Dahrendorf's theory thus implies that authority is dichotomous: you have it or you do not, and your interests are formed accordingly. Critics have suggested that whether you have more or less authority may be equally important and thus that conflict may form around other groupings. But Dahrendorf affirms, with Marx, that conflict involves only two sides. On the other hand, all "classes" do not engage in active conflicts all the time. Dahrendorf therefore attempts to explain when people will actually mobilize.

The Mobilization of Classes The structural requirements for people to form active "interest groups" are "technical," "political," and "social." Technically, Dahrendorf argues, a group requires a founder and a charter or ideology to become active. Politically, the more liberal the state, the more likely is the mobilization for active conflict; the more totalitarian the state, the less likely. Finally, three social factors are important. Group formation is more likely first, if potential members are fairly well-concentrated geographically; second, if they can communicate easily (as modern communications technology makes it easier for them to do); and third, if people who stand in the same relation to authority are recruited in similar ways and come, for example, from the same type of families or educational organizations.

The most important psychological requirements are, of course, that individuals identify with the interests associated with their position and that these interests seem important and "real" to them. Dahrendorf disagrees with Marx's argument that people's class positions (in either the "property" or the "authority" sense) determine the whole of their social life and behavior, but he does believe class interests will be more "real" to people who also share a culture. He also suggests that people are less likely to identify with their class's interests and to mobilize, the larger the number of associations to which they belong. Finally, the greater people's personal chances of leaving their class-in other words, the greater the degree of "intra-generational mobility"-the less likely they are to identify actively with it.

Dahrendorf's "structural" arguments are fairly convincing, although he pays surprisingly little attention to force. He tends to emphasize that if conflict is not to become explosive, there must be some degree of mobility and freedom to express opposition. But as tyrannies throughout history have shown, a sufficient degree of force can suppress conflict very effectively.

Dahrendorf's discussion of the "psychological" requirements for class action is less satisfactory. Especially in preindustrial societies, the poor have often shared a culture, led lives confined to the immediate community, had few opportunities for advancement, and yet accepted the existing order of things almost without question. Thus, Dahrendorf fails to explain satisfactorily how attitudes of opposition originate.

Chafetz and Dworkin had similarly mixed success in explaining the rise of women's movements using Dahrendorf's perspective. The appearance and size of ameliorative" movements, concerned simply with legal and educational reforms, can be related very clearly to the breakdown of geographical barriers and to ease of communication-Dahrendorf's structural requirements. What the authors call "second-wave" movements, however-such as U.S. feminism-challenge gender roles directly and are highly ideological. Chafetz and Dworkin are correspondingly less successful in explaining why such feminist ideologies have emerged more or less strong- 1 yin different industrialized countries.

Conflict in Industry During the last hundred years, there have been increasing numbers of "joint stock" companies, in which ownership by shareholders is divorced from management control. As we have seen, modern Marxist sociologists generally argue that the change is not very important, since the firms still represent and are run in the interests of the owners. Other writers, such as Burnham.P" believe that it signifies a far-reaching change in social structure and the roots of power.

Dahrendorf argues that his approach demonstrates both what has really changed and what has not. He suggests that because nineteenth-century managers and owners were generally the same people, Marx mistakenly ascribed to property differences a conflict that actually centered on authority, although it was intensified by the "superimposition" of industrial authority, wealth, and political influence. Today, he continues, industrial conflict will be less intense both because ownership and control are separate and because of industry's "institutional isolation" (which means that one's position in industry has less to do with the rest of one's life than before). At the same time, the split in authority and the conflicts of interest it generates remain. Arguments that the divide between workers and management has blurred are quite mistaken.

A study with direct relevance to Dahrendorf's argument is *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*. This intensive survey of affluent British industrial workers was largely aimed at determining whether there had been a breakdown of the old social division between the "working" and the "middle" classes. The results cast doubt on the degree to which industry is, as Dahrendorf suggests, "institutionally isolated." The workers' family-centered social life, for example, remained quite separate from that of white-collar families. However, although union organization was stronger in these plants than in many much less wealthy areas, these workers were only rarely committed to the "union movement" as a national "working-class" force; instead they were extremely involved in union affairs at the level of the workplace. Only 8 percent attended union branch meetings often enough to vote regularly in branch elections, but 83 percent voted regularly for their shop stewards. In other words, they were closely involved in union organization at the level where they were given orders directly and where they grouped together, to face and face down the managers who gave them, but not in questions of union and economic policy or "class" politics at the national level.

Lesson 14**Conflict Perspective: Ralf Dahrendorf-II (53-57)****Topic 53: Theory of conflict groups**

Conflict and the State Dahrendorf argues that in the state, as in industry, the crucial lines of conflict are between those who give and those who receive orders. The state is the most powerful association in society, and the "ruling class" is, in a sense, the elite group that holds the positions at the top of the state hierarchy. But the ruling class is not composed solely of this group. The bureaucracy, too, belongs to a chain of command, and this command of authority makes it part of the ruling class, even though it does not define the concerns and objectives of a bureaucratic state. Dahrendorf's argument helps explain the enormous stability of such bureaucratic states as Byzantium and the Egypt of the Pharaohs. The larger the authority-bearing class, the larger the group that will marshal against any threat to it from an organized conflict group of subordinates.

Dahrendorf's argument also implies that the state and bureaucracy are together a separate institution, not simply a reflection of other social groupings, and that other powerful social groups will necessarily oppose the state's authority and try to influence it and restrict its control over them. Thus, in Washington, a building boom transformed the downtown area during the 1970s and 1980s. The new offices house thousands of registered lobbyists, as well as law firms that are expanding in response to more and more regulatory legislation. In Dahrendorf's own recent analyses of British politics, he argues that "clearly there is today a conflict between government and industry" in which the trade unions are the most visible protagonists but which also involves the giant companies.

A number of modern commentators echo Dahrendorf when they write that growing government activity will have consequences for the range and intensity of political conflict. For example, Christopher DeMuth, a faculty member at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government who formerly worked for Conrail, discussed in *The Wall Street Journal* the behavior of the Greyhound bus company. He described how Greyhound lobbied vigorously against the federal subsidies given to passenger trains, with which the buses must compete, while it attempted with equal vigor to stop the Interstate Commerce Commission from allowing new bus companies to start competing with Greyhound and tried to prevent any general deregulation of bus transport. DeMuth argues, "There is no reason to expect Greyhound or any other company to compete in the economic marketplace while abstaining from the political marketplace ... [when the government involvement] becomes ... sufficiently large, it alters fundamentally the nature of competition in the private part [of the economy]-increasing the relative importance of political as opposed to economic competition."

Topic 54-55: Intensity and violence of conflict

The Violence and Intensity of Conflict Dahrendorf also discusses at considerable length what affects the intensity and violence of class conflict when it occurs. He defines violence as "a matter of the weapons that are chosen" and intensity as the "energy expenditure and degree of involvement of conflicting parties."

Dahrendorf argues that there is one preeminent factor affecting the degree of violence. This is how far conflict is institutionalized, with mutually accepted "rules of the game"; "those

who have agreed to carry on their disagreements by means of discussion do not usually engage in physical violence." For example, the days of extreme violence in strike breaking and picketing in America predate the general acceptance of unions.

Dahrendorf also identifies three important factors influencing the intensity of a conflict. Of these, the first (which he also considers to be the most important²³⁹) is the degree to which those who are in positions of subjection in one association are in the same position in their other associations. The second and parallel factor is the degree to which authority in an organization is held by people who are also "on top" in other respects—in Dahrendorf's terms whether positions are "pluralist" or "superimposed." Thus, if the managers of firms are also the owners and if they also use their wealth and position to control politics, one can expect particularly intense industrial conflicts.

Dahrendorf's third argument is that the greater the mobility between positions, the less intense the conflict will be. This is true not only when individuals themselves can move, but also when their children are mobile. This is partly because mobility makes it less likely that a class will have a common culture and partly because people are less inclined to attack a class their children may one day join. On the other hand, if there is little or no mobility, the struggle becomes more intense.

Dahrendorf's theory allows one to pinpoint potential areas of conflict within any given organization. As we have seen, however, it does not give enough attention to the role of brute force. Nor does it help us much in predicting which organizations (of the many in which people give or receive orders) are more likely to experience open conflict. One simple reason for the latter problem is that Dahrendorf does not discuss how important a given institution is to someone's life. In a society of "superimposed" positions, there is almost certain to be one major source of power and authority from which the others follow. When conflicts in totalitarian countries do break through, they center on the party's power and control of the state. In Western societies, since both the state and one's place of work are very important institutions, they are both far more likely to generate active conflict than an athletic or church social club. Dahrendorf's own discussion does, in fact, pay most attention to industrial enterprises and the state.

Topic 56: Consequences of conflict

Conflict often triggers social change, particularly with respect to the authority structure of an organization or the overall society. Structural change may involve changing the personnel in positions of authority or incorporation of the interests of the subordinate class in the policies of the dominant class (Dahrendorf, 1959:232–233). If members of the subordinate class are actually incorporated into the dominant class, there is a risk they will eventually be coopted and neglect the interests of the subordinate class. One major reason for this is the pattern described by Michels' (1949) iron law of oligarchy, whereby persons who move up from the subordinate class into the dominant class often shift their priorities to maintaining their new positions of domination instead of promoting the interests of the subordinate class from which they were recruited. Dahrendorf also proposed that structural change can be analyzed in terms of how radical and how sudden it is. These variables, like intensity and violence, may vary independently. Radicalness refers to the extent of structural change, while suddenness obviously refers to its speed. Change may be sudden and radical, as in a revolution, or it may be slow but also radical. In the latter case, the radicalness

may not be consciously experienced as such because of the long time period in which it occurs. For example, even though the United States has never experienced a revolutionary overthrow of the government (despite the Civil War conflict), it can be seen as radically different in many ways from what it was a century ago, particularly in terms of the expansion of the welfare functions of government. Similarly, nonradical changes may also be either slow or sudden. A pattern of slow and nonradical change would be manifested when authority figures and their subordinates engage in minor renegotiations from time to time regarding the scope of subordinates' obligations and their level of compensation. In contrast, a rapid but nonradical change may be seen in the process whereby Democrats and Republicans replace one another after national elections in the United States without making fundamental changes in the overall political structure of society. (This sometimes gives rise to the complaint that nothing ever changes despite the election of a new president.)

The radicalness and the suddenness of structural change are themselves related to the intensity and violence of class conflict. Dahrendorf suggested that there is a positive relationship between the intensity of conflict and the radicalness of structural change (even though such radical change need not necessarily be sudden). Similarly, he hypothesized that the violence of conflict is correlated with the suddenness of structural change. Revolutionary political change would illustrate this pattern of sudden change, but smaller-scale changes may also occur suddenly in response to demands backed up by violence (or the threat of violence). In Dahrendorf's perspective, Marx's diagnosis of capitalism should be seen as a special case that was relevant only for the earlier years of capitalism. In Marx's analysis, class formation and class conflict took place under the following historically specific conditions: "(a) absence of mobility, (b) superimposition of authority, property, and general social status, (c) superimposition of industrial and political conflict, and (d) absence of effective conflict regulation. Thus, classes are conflict groups involved in extremely intense and violent conflicts directed toward equally extremely sudden and radical changes" (Dahrendorf, 1959:245). However, changes since Marx's time with regard to these conditions have had the effect of decreasing the intensity and violence of class conflict. Institutionalized patterns of conflict regulation, increased mobility, increased material affluence, greater socioeconomic security of persons in subordinate classes, and institutional segregation of industrial, political, and other forms of conflict help prevent serious challenges to the basic structure of the system. Overall, then, although conflict generally creates pressures for social change, whether the change involves revolutionary overthrow of the system and its authority structure or evolutionary development within it is an empirical question. The answer depends on the various factors discussed above that influence conflict group formation and the extent to which conflict regulation mechanisms have been developed. The institutionalization of procedures to regulate conflict may be seen as reinforcing the existing structure but at the same time allowing evolutionary change within it. If such mechanisms are effective, the chances for the kind of revolutionary overthrow that Marx had predicted in the early days of capitalism are drastically diminished.

Topic 57: Conflict model vs. functional model

Although Dahrendorf regarded his perspective as an alternative to the functionalist emphasis on solidarity, integration, and equilibrium, he believed both perspectives are needed for a more comprehensive picture of social structure than either can offer by itself. He described the opposing assumptions of the two perspectives as the "two faces" of society (Dahrendorf, 1959:157–179). Functional theory emphasizes stability, integration, functional integration, and value consensus.

Conflict theory, in contrast, emphasizes the ubiquitous nature of conflict, the effects of conflict in stimulating social change, inequalities in resources and power, the way different elements in society contribute to its disintegration, and the use of coercion to maintain social control (Dahrendorf, 1959:161–162). When summarized in this oversimplified form, the contrast between the two models is of course exaggerated. As we have seen, Dahrendorf's own analysis of conflict in modern industrial society is not consistent with the underlying assumptions of conflict theory that he identified. For example, in his conflict model, established patterns of conflict regulation contribute to the maintenance of the existing authority structure, not its disintegration and change. The challenge is to incorporate both the conflict and the consensus perspectives into a more comprehensive theoretical framework and to identify the conditions in which conflict theory seems more appropriate as opposed to functionalist theory. This is essentially the strategy that Gerhard Lenski (1966) used in applying the functional model to simple, small-scale societies and the conflict model to complex,

large-scale societies. But even within a society as it exists at any given stage of its history, both models are relevant to different degrees in different contexts, and the processes they describe are often interrelated in complex ways. In the final analysis, both models are important for understanding social relations and social structures. However, conflict is the major focus of Randall Collins' conflict theory—the next perspective to be considered.

Lesson 15**Conflict Perspective: C. Wright Mills-I (Topic 58-60)****Topic 58: Introduction of C. Wright Mills**

Among American sociologists, C. Wright Mills (1916-1962) is the best-known recent theorist whose work combines a conflict perspective with a strong critique of the social order. Mills was born and raised in Texas; he never left the state until he was in his twenties, when he won a research fellowship to the University of Wisconsin. Most of his academic career was spent at Columbia, where he was a professor until he died of a heart condition while still in his mid-forties.

Mills was subjected to a barrage of criticism, especially in his later years, when his writing became increasingly accusatory and polemical. He also had many admirers and was never quite the "lone wolf" he considered himself. Mills was increasingly agonized and pessimistic about the immediate future. He believed that immorality was built into the American system, and he never voted because he considered political parties to be manipulative and "irrational" organizations. He also bitterly attacked his fellow intellectuals for abdicating their social responsibilities and for putting themselves at the service of men of power while they hid behind a mask of "value-free" analysis.

Mills thought that it was possible to create a "good society" on the basis of knowledge and that men of knowledge must take responsibility its absence.¹⁶⁵ He believed in a libertarian socialism, and he supported the Cuban revolution (and attacked the United States' reaction to it) because he hoped that it would combine revolutionary socialism and freedom.¹⁶⁶ In his sociology, his major themes were the relationship between bureaucracy and alienation and the centralization of power in a "power elite." Both these subjects were aspects of his attack on modern American society.

Topic 59: Sociological imagination

Mills argues that micro and macro levels of analysis can be linked by the sociological imagination. As he describes it:

The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the large historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues.

Mills contends that individuals can only understand their own experiences fully if they can locate themselves within their period of history. Then they become aware of the life chances shared by all individuals in the same circumstances. Thus, the sociological imagination enables us to "grasp his- tory and biography and the relations between the two within society."

Mills makes an important distinction between personal troubles and public issues. Personal troubles are those troubles which occur "within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of his immediate milieu" and relations with other people. Public issues are

matters that have to do with the "institutions of an historical society as a whole," with the overlapping of various milieus which interpenetrate to "form the larger structures of social and historical life." To explain this distinction, Mills presents the example of unemployment. If only one person in a city of 100,000 is unemployed, then it is a personal trouble. But if 5 million people are unemployed in a nation of 50 million, that is a public issue.

Dobash and Dobash used Mills' approach in their study entitled *Violence Against Wives*. They analyzed the laws and ordinances which, throughout history, have legitimized the physical abuse of women, and they combined this study with an analysis of nearly a thousand police and court cases of assaults against wives and with hundreds of hours of in-depth interviews with battered women. For each individual, what was involved was a private trouble. The scale of the problem and the law's lack of concern made it a public issue.

Topic 60: Alienation and bureaucracy

Mills argues that the material hardships of the workers of the past have been replaced today by a psychological malaise rooted in workers' alienation from what they make.¹⁶⁹ He sees white-collar workers as apathetic, frightened, and molded by mass culture. In modern society, he argues, "those who hold power have often come to exercise it in hidden ways: they have moved and are moving from authority to manipulation. . . . The rational systems hide their power so that no one sees their sources of authority or understands their calculation. For the bureaucracy ... the world is an object to be manipulated."

In a world of big business and big government, the ever-increasing group of white-collar people lives not by making things, but by helping to turn what someone else has made into profits for yet another person. Fewer and fewer people own their own productive property and control their own working lives. Stable communities and traditional values, which "fixed" people into society, have disappeared, and their disappearance throws the whole system of prestige or status into flux. Like Veblen, Mills believes that status and self-esteem are closely linked, and the loss of traditional values, he argues, undermines people's self-esteem and embroils them in a status "panic." In fact, Mills' concerns here are curiously like those of Durkheim and the functionalists, who see modern society as threatened by normlessness, or anomie. His critics argue that he ignores the freedom that the breakup of old and restrictive communities can offer.

Unlike Marx, Mills does not believe that work is necessarily the crucial expression of oneself, but he does condemn modern bureaucratic capitalism for alienating people from both the process and product of work. This is particularly clear, Mills argues, with white-collar workers like sales-people whose personalities become commodities to be sold and for whom friendliness and courtesy are part of the "impersonal means of livelihood." Thus, he claims, "in all work involving the personality market, ... one's personality and personal traits become part of the means of production ... [which] has carried self and social alienation to explicit extremes."

Mills' emphasis on alienation derives from his concern with the relationship between character and social structure. Salesmanship, he argues, estranges people from themselves and others because they view all relationships as manipulative. Alienation from work makes people turn frenziedly to leisure, but the entertainment industry produces synthetic excitement, which offers no real release and establishes no deep common values. Other aspects of social structure

strengthen psychological tendencies that make modern societies liable to fascist or revolutionary totalitarian success. People's fragmented working environments give them little understanding of how society works, and they believe that the interventionist government is responsible for insecurity and misfortune. An increasingly centralized structure with no remaining traditional beliefs and with permanently anxious people is, Mills argues, highly vulnerable.

Lesson 16**Conflict Perspective: C. Wright Mills-II (Topic 61-65)****Topic 61-62: Power elite**

Mills argues consistently that the growth of large structures has been accompanied by a centralization of power and that the men who head government, corporations, the armed forces, and the unions are very closely linked. He carries this part of his analysis the furthest in his discussion of the "power elite."

Mills argues that America is ruled by a "power elite" made up of people who hold the dominant positions in political, military, and economic institutions. "Within the American society," he writes, "major national power now resides in the economic, the political and the military domains Within each of the big three, the typical institutional unit has become enlarged, has become administrative, and, in the power of its decision, has become centralized [The] means of power at the disposal of centralized decision-making units have increased enormously."

Mills argues, moreover, that the three domains are interlocked, so that "the leading men in each of the three domains of power-the warlords, the corporate chieftains, the political directorate-tend to come together to form the power elite of America: ... The military capitalism of private corporations exists in a weakened and formal democratic system containing an already quite politicized military order." Mills believed that power can be based on factors other than property. However, the unity of the elite's institutional interests brings them together and maintains a war economy.

Mills' analysis coincided with and reinforced an attitude toward American society that was apparent in Eisenhower's denunciation of the "military-industrial complex." Many nonradical sociologists agree that economic life is increasingly intertwined with the activities of the government. However, they argue that it is not simply military expenditures that are important, but rather the increased involvement of government in all spheres of economic life. Those of us who live in Washington notice how, month by month, more and more industrial, trade, and labor associations set up headquarters in the city's burgeoning office blocks, close to the federal government and its power.

Moreover, critics frequently disagree with Mills' perception of a single "power elite" pursuing its united interest and excluding others from influence. They argue that powerful interests may-and frequently do-conflict with each other. "Business," for example, undoubtedly has power. It gets some of the measures it wants, and some firms and industries acquire a protected, semimonopolistic position from government regulators. For others, however, plans are delayed or demolished by decisions about environmental quality, prices are set at levels they oppose, or costs are raised by taxes, government paperwork, pollution requirements, and the like.

In general, Mills shares with Marxist sociology and the "elite theorists" a tendency to see a society as divided rather sharply and horizontally between the powerful and the powerless. He also shares Marxist and neo-Marxist theorists' concerns about alienation, the effects of

social structure on the personality, and the "manipulation" of people by the mass media. At the same time, however, Mills clearly belongs to a distinctively American populist tradition, which does not regard property as such as the main source of evil in society. To Mills, small-scale property ownership and the class of independent entrepreneurs are the major safeguards of freedom and security, and he regrets the waning of the old American society of independent farmers and businessmen."

Topic 63: Centralization of power in modern society

Both the large size and the high centralization of the dominant institutions that Mills analyzed depend on modern technologies of production, administration, and communication. As Mills stated: From even the most superficial examination of the history of western society we learn that the power of decision-makers is first of all limited by the level of technique, by the means of power and violence and organization that prevail in a given society. In this connection we also learn that there is a fairly straight line running upward through the history of the West; that the means of oppression and exploitation, of violence and destruction, as well as the means of production and reconstruction, have been progressively enlarged and increasingly centralized. (Mills, 1956:23) In Mills' (1956) historical overview, mid -twentieth century America differs substantially from earlier periods. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Jacksonian ideal of democratic equality, coupled with the rapidly expanding development of the American frontier, resulted in a much more decentralized system than had existed during the Revolutionary War period. During this period, the economic structure consisted mostly of small businessmen and farmers, none of whom was in a position to have a major impact on the system as a whole. Political power was limited and decentralized, and resistance to government expansion was justified by the ideal of preserving individual liberty. This decentralized power structure began to change in the economic sector with the growth of large-scale business corporations in the second half of the nineteenth century. The opening years of the twentieth century then witnessed the concentration of political power resulting initially from American involvement in World War I. The Great Depression of the 1930s signaled a breakdown in the self -regulating character of the market system and eventually stimulated additional enlargement of the federal government. With various New Deal programs, government became much more active in the economic system, resulting in a tremendous growth in the federal government and expansion of its power. Involvement in World War II then stimulated the permanent expansion and consolidation of the third major co-dominant circle of power: the military system. Although formally under civilian political control, the military system achieved a status that was virtually coequal with the political and economic power structures. Even President Eisenhower (who had formerly been a military general) had issued a warning about the growing influence of the military industrial complex. The system was justified by the Cold War ideology of the 1950s. Although Mills died before the beginning of the Vietnam war that so divided our country in the late 1960s, his perspective on the American power structure would lead us to evaluate that long, painful, and unproductive struggle as a result of the commanding influence of the military-industrial complex. A similar critique could be applied to the United States invasion of Iraq in the early twenty-first century. Mills summarized his analysis of the growth of the power elite as follows: As each of these domains becomes enlarged and centralized, the consequences of its activities become greater, and its traffic with the others

increases. The decisions of a handful of corporations bear upon military and political as well as upon economic developments around the world. The decisions of the military establishment rest upon and grievously affect political life as well as the very level of economic activity. The decisions made within the political domain determine economic activities and military programs. (Mills, 1956:7)

The interpenetrating and interlocking nature of the policies and activities of these dominant institutional orders is based on social psychological as well as social structural factors. Mills pointed out that the elites in these structures had similar social backgrounds and worldviews. In addition to their great wealth, power, and prestige, many of them came from long-established families that traditionally enjoyed high status or had social acquaintances among them. They also tended to have the same kind of educational background, and they intermingled with one another in various clubs and cliques. In addition, some of them moved back and forth between the top of one institutional order and another. In Mills' time perhaps the most dramatic example was the case of General Eisenhower, who became President Eisenhower.

Despite these overlapping personal and institutional contacts, Mills did not regard the power elite as a closed or static clique with a completely unified set of policies. Different projects or issues could bring together different sets of individuals. On some issues there may be disagreements. Occasionally, too, promising new members were recruited from the middle ranks of power. In short, the power elite was not seen as a single monolithic structure but a series of overlapping and intersecting networks with partially permeable boundaries. But Mills emphasized the institutional and social psychological bonds that set the elites apart from others in the population.

Topic 64: Mass media and mass society

Mills disagreed sharply with the widespread view at the time of the American power structure as amorphous and pluralistic (Mills, 1956:242–268). According to this pluralistic image, there are numerous, largely autonomous centers of power in American society whose members must negotiate and compromise with one another in establishing national policies. Although certain coalitions may achieve temporary dominance on particular issues, these power centers were seen generally as being in a state of balance in which no one center is able to dominate for very long or on all issues. Mills suggested that balance theory was appealing because of its congruence with American democratic ideology, but he also pointed out that it applies more to the middle levels of power than the top levels. Moreover, because the activities and decisions of the top elites are not necessarily always widely publicized, the public at large has little reason to question the pluralistic image. In Mills' time the news media had not yet developed the kind of aggressive investigating and reporting techniques that have become common in recent decades. And certainly it would have been in the interests of the power elite to minimize public visibility of their dominance and to support the pluralistic balance theory. Mills (1956) viewed the vast majority of people beneath the middle levels of power as a fragmented, passive, and inarticulate mass society whose members are too unorganized to have any significant impact on public policy or even on the middle levels of power (see also Mills, 1951). The passive nature of mass society results largely from the way the mass media are able to manipulate public opinions and attitudes through distorted and simplified presentations of public issues in ways that are not conducive to public dialogue. Thus

the elites are able to present their decisions and actions to the public as being in accordance with democratic principles, thereby implicitly justifying the sociopolitical status quo and their elite positions. Beyond this, the media offer escapist forms of entertainment that divert people's attention from sociopolitical issues. Mills' critique of the mass media and mass society may seem at first to be less relevant today because the mass media themselves are less homogeneous, and their role in criticizing the political power structure has expanded greatly. Moreover, since the late 1960s there has been a higher level of mobilization of various segments of the population to deal with various social problems. Some of the important social movements have developed since Mills' diagnosis of his times include the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the environmental movement, and the gay/lesbian movement. Moreover, through new electronic forms of communication, there are increased opportunities for the public to be heard, even though they may not be organized effectively. In some case, the news media themselves provide opportunities for public feedback. On the other hand, the mass media today also offer multiple options for being diverted to a highly simulated world that they create, thereby avoiding the practical world of public affairs or civic involvement. The key point is that Mills' critique leads us to look at how power elites are able to maintain their position, sometimes by neutralizing or coopting their opponents, in an environment of widespread public apathy. The mass media still play a crucial role in this process.

Topic 65: Power structures and “Iron law of oligarchy”

Mills' analysis of the American power structure is consistent with the organizational processes portrayed by German theorist Robert Michels (1876–1936) as the “iron law of oligarchy.” This concept refers to a tendency for power to become concentrated in the hands of an elite group whose decisions and activities are oriented more toward maintaining their positions of power than promoting the interests of the rank and file (Michels [1915] 1949). This process occurred in the political parties and labor unions that Michels analyzed despite their democratic ideology. The dynamics of this transformation originate in organizational growth and the establishment of paid leadership or administrative positions. With these developments the social distance between rank and file members and official authorities and administrators makes it difficult for the average member to exert influence on organizational policies or administrative decisions. In addition, organizational growth leads eventually to expansion in the number of administrative officials who form their own privileged subgroup and pursue their own distinctive interests. In the meantime, the interest and involvement of rank and file members tends to decline, especially as they discover that their voices will probably not be heard anyway. Widespread apathy may lead members to neglect even minimal opportunities for involvement such as voting. This apathy and indifference make it easier for the authorities to consolidate their power and pursue their interests without undue concern for resistance by the rank and file.

If an opposition movement should develop, those in power may criticize movement leaders as being uninformed and pursuing their own narrow or selfish interests. Moreover, authority figures may use resources they control to “buy off” or coopt potential opponents. In American presidential politics, for example, the incumbent alone has the opportunity to “act presidential” in supporting policies that benefit key constituencies. Not least among the resources of those in

power is the opportunity to recruit (or coopt) opponents or potential opponents into the elite circle. The organizational dynamics implied by the iron law of oligarchy do not mean that overthrowing established power structures is impossible. The history of organizations and societies reveals that power structures are sometimes overthrown and replaced. Nevertheless, enormous odds must be overcome. When such movements are successful, the new power structures are likely to develop the same oligarchical tendencies, despite appeals that may have been made to democratic principles in the struggle to overthrow the old regime. C. Wright Mills died in 1962, less than a decade before the eruption of the anti-Vietnam war and other countercultural protest movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thus he did not witness the steep decline in the influence of functionalism or the development of a strong critical and neo-Marxist movement within American sociology. Nevertheless, the sociological imagination he advocated represented a critical stance toward society and also toward sociological theorists who fail to develop a critique of existing social structures.

Lesson 17**Frankfurt school: Critical theory-I (Topic 66-70)****Topic 66: Frankfurt school: The major critiques of social and intellectual life**

Critical theory is the product of a group of German neo-Marxists who were dissatisfied with the state of Marxian theory (J. Bernstein, 1995; Kellner, 1993, 2005c; for a broader view of critical theory, see Agger, 1998), particularly its tendency toward economic determinism. The organization associated with critical theory, the Institute of Social Research, was officially founded in Frankfurt, Germany, on February 23, 1923 (Wheatland, 2009; Wiggershaus, 1994). Critical theory has spread beyond the confines of the Frankfurt school (Calhoun and Karaganis, 2001; Kellner, 2005c; Langman, 2007; Telos, 1989–1990). Critical theory was and is largely a European orientation, although its influence in American sociology has grown (Marcus, 1999; van den Berg, 1980).

Although all the theorists discussed in this section provide a critique of contemporary society, the term critical theory is also associated specifically with the theorists of the Frankfurt School. The work of the older Frankfurt theorists only became well-known among English-speaking sociologists in the 1960s. However, Jurgen Habermas, the most important active theorist of the Frankfurt School, is becoming increasingly influential in both Europe and the United States.

The analyses of the Frankfurt theorists owe a great deal to Marx, and, like him, they emphasize the importance of conflicts of interests based on property relationships. However, they are by no means orthodox Marxists. They owe a major debt to Hegel, and they draw more on Marx's early and more "Hegelian" work, such as his writings on alienation, than on his later, more economic analyses. In addition, they are very interested in uniting psychoanalysis and Marxism, an effort toward which orthodox Marxism (or Marxism-Leninism) is highly unsympathetic. These different influences are apparent in the aspects of their "critical theory" described later: their view of social science, their critique of mass culture and its place in the "administered society," and Habermas' recasting of Marx's evolutionary theory, and emerging theory of "communicative action."

The Frankfurt School is so called because of its association with a single institution, the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt in Germany. The Institute was founded in 1923 with funds from one of its members, Felix Weil, and his wealthy father; its most important members were Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), and Erich Fromm (1900-1980). All of them came from comfortable, middle-class Jewish homes, and all had fled Germany for America by the mid-1930s because their political views made the continuation of the Institute impossible. Marcuse remained in the United States and worked for the American State Department until the Korean War, when he returned to academic life. He taught at Columbia, Harvard, Brandeis, and the University of California, San Diego. Fromm, who broke with the Institute soon after his arrival in America, practiced psychoanalysis in New York and became a founder and trustee of the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis,

and Psychology. In 1949, he moved to Mexico because of his wife's health. There he started the Department of Psychoanalysis at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and founded and directed the Mexican Psychoanalytic Institute, while still commuting regularly to the United States and academic appointments in New York and Michigan.

Topic 67: Criticism of Marxian theory

Criticisms of Marxian Theory Critical theory takes as its starting point a critique of Marxian theories. The critical theorists are most disturbed by the economic determinists—the mechanistic, or mechanical, Marxists (Antonio, 1981; Schroyer, 1973; Sewart, 1978). Some (for example, Habermas, 1971) criticize the determinism implicit in parts of Marx's original work, but most focus their criticisms on the neo-Marxists, primarily because they had interpreted Marx's work too mechanistically. The critical theorists do not say that economic determinists were wrong in focusing on the economic realm but that they should have been concerned with other aspects of social life as well. As we will see, the critical school seeks to rectify this imbalance by focusing its attention on the cultural realm (Fuery and Mansfield, 2000; Schroyer, 1973:33). In addition to attacking other Marxian theories, the critical school critiqued societies, such as the former Soviet Union, built ostensibly on Marxian theory (Marcuse, 1958).

Topic 68: Criticism of positivism

Critical theorists also focus on the philosophical underpinnings of scientific inquiry, especially positivism (Bottomore, 1984; Fuller, 2007a; Halfpenny, 2001, 2005; Morrow, 1994). The criticism of positivism is related, at least in part, to the criticism of economic determinism, because some of those who were determinists accepted part or all of the positivistic theory of knowledge. Positivism is depicted as accepting the idea that a single scientific method is applicable to all fields of study. It takes the physical sciences as the standard of certainty and exactness for all disciplines. Positivists believe that knowledge is inherently neutral. They feel that they can keep human values out of their work. This belief, in turn, leads to the view that science is not in the position of advocating any specific form of social action. (See Chapter 1 for more discussion of positivism.) Positivism is opposed by the critical school on various grounds (Sewart, 1978). For one thing, positivism tends to reify the social world and see it as a natural process. The critical theorists prefer to focus on human activity as well as on the ways in which such activity affects larger social structures. In short, positivism loses sight of the actors (Habermas, 1971), reducing them to passive entities determined by “natural forces.” Given their belief in the distinctiveness of the actor, the critical theorists would not accept the idea that the general laws of science can be applied without question to human action. Positivism is assailed for being content to judge the adequacy of means toward given ends and for not making a similar judgment about ends. This critique leads to the view that positivism is inherently conservative, incapable of challenging the existing system. As Martin Jay says of positivism, “The result was the absolutizing of ‘facts’ and the reification of the existing order” (1973:62). Positivism leads the actor and the social scientist to passivity. Few Marxists of any type would support a perspective that does not relate theory and practice. Despite these criticisms of positivism, some Marxists (for example, some structuralists, analytic Marxists) espouse positivism, and Marx himself was often guilty of being overly positivistic (Habermas, 1971).

Topic 69: Criticism of sociology

Sociology is attacked for its “scientism,” that is, for making the scientific method an end in itself. In addition, sociology is accused of accepting the status quo. The critical school maintains that sociology does not seriously criticize society or seek to transcend the contemporary social structure. Sociology, the critical school contends, has surrendered its obligation to help people oppressed by contemporary society. Members of this school are critical of sociologists’ focus on society as a whole rather than on individuals in society; sociologists are accused of ignoring the interaction of the individual and society. Although most sociological perspectives are not guilty of ignoring this interaction, this view is a cornerstone of the critical school’s attacks on sociologists. Because they ignore the individual, sociologists are seen as being unable to say anything meaningful about political changes that could lead to a “just and humane society” (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, 1973:46). As Zoltan Tar put it, sociology becomes “an integral part of the existing society instead of being a means of critique and a ferment of renewal” (1977:x).

Topic 70: Critique of modern society

Most of the critical school’s work is aimed at a critique of modern society and a variety of its components. Whereas much of early Marxian theory aimed specifically at the economy, the critical school shifted its orientation to the cultural level in light of what it considers the realities of modern capitalist society. That is, the locus of domination in the modern world shifted from the economy to the cultural realm. Still, the critical school retains its interest in domination, although in the modern world it is likely to be domination by cultural rather than economic elements. The critical school thus seeks to focus on the cultural repression of the individual in modern society. The critical thinkers have been shaped not only by Marxian theory but also by Weberian theory, as reflected in their focus on rationality as the dominant development in the modern world. In fact, supporters of this approach often are labeled “Weberian Marxists” (Dahms, 1997; Lowy, 1996). As Trent Schroyer (1970) made clear, the view of the critical school is that in modern society the repression produced by rationality has replaced economic exploitation as the dominant social problem. The critical school clearly has adopted Weber’s differentiation between formal rationality and substantive rationality, or what the critical theorists think of as reason. To the critical theorists, formal rationality is concerned unreflectively with the question of the most effective means for achieving any given purpose (Tar, 1977). This is viewed as “technocratic thinking,” in which the objective is to serve the forces of domination, not to emancipate people from domination. The goal is simply to find the most efficient means to whatever ends are defined as important by those in power. Technocratic thinking is contrasted to reason, which is, in the minds of critical theorists, the hope for society. Reason involves the assessment of means in terms of the ultimate human values of justice, peace, and happiness. Critical theorists identified Nazism in general, and its concentration camps more specifically, as examples of formal rationality in mortal combat with reason. Thus, as George Friedman puts it, “Auschwitz was a rational place, but it was not a reasonable one” (1981:15; see also Chapter 15 and the discussion of Bauman, 1989). Despite the seeming rationality of modern life, the critical school views the modern world as rife with irrationality (Crook, 1995). This idea can be labeled the “irrationality of rationality”

or, more specifically, the irrationality of formal rationality. In Herbert Marcuse's view, although it appears to be the embodiment of rationality, "this society is irrational as a whole" (1964:ix; see also Farganis, 1975). It is irrational that the rational world is destructive of individuals and their needs and abilities, that peace is maintained through a constant threat of war, and that despite the existence of sufficient means, people remain impoverished, repressed, exploited, and unable to fulfill themselves.

The critical school focuses primarily on one form of formal rationality—modern technology (Feenberg, 1996). Marcuse (1964), for example, was a severe critic of modern technology, at least as it is employed in capitalism. He saw technology in modern capitalist society as leading to totalitarianism. In fact, he viewed it as leading to new, more effective, and even more "pleasant" methods of external control over individuals. The prime example is the use of television to socialize and pacify the population (other examples are mass sport, and pervasive exploitation of sex). Marcuse rejected the idea that technology is neutral in the modern world and saw it instead as a means to dominate people. It is effective because it is made to seem neutral when it is in fact enslaving. It serves to suppress individuality. The actor's inner freedom has been "invaded and whittled down" by modern technology. The result is what Marcuse called "one dimensional society," in which individuals lose the ability to think critically and negatively about society. Marcuse did not see technology per se as the enemy, but rather technology as it is employed in modern capitalist society: "Technology, no matter how 'pure,' sustains and streamlines the continuum of domination. This fatal link can be cut only by a revolution which makes technology and technique subservient to the needs and goals of free men" (1969:56). Marcuse retained Marx's original view that technology is not inherently a problem and that it can be used to develop a "better" society.

Lesson 18**Frankfurt school: Critical theory-II (Topic 71-73)****Topic 71: Critique of culture**

The critical theorists level significant criticisms at what they call the “culture industry” (Kellner and Lewis, 2007), the rationalized, bureaucratized structures (for example, the television networks) that control modern culture. Interest in the culture industry reflects their concern with the Marxian concept of “superstructure” rather than with the economic base (Beamish, 2007e). The culture industry, producing what is conventionally called “mass culture,” is defined as the “administered . . . nonspontaneous, reified, phony culture rather than the real thing” (Jay, 1973:216; see also Lash and Urry, 2007).² Two things worry the critical thinkers most about this industry. First, they are concerned about its falseness. They think of it as a prepackaged set of ideas mass-produced and disseminated to the masses by the media. Second, the critical theorists are disturbed by its pacifying, repressive, and stupefying effect on people (D. Cook, 1996; G. Friedman, 1981; Tar, 1977:83; Zipes, 1994). Douglas Kellner (1990) has self-consciously offered a critical theory of television. While he embeds his work in the cultural concerns of the Frankfurt school, Kellner draws on other Marxian traditions to present a more rounded conception of the television industry. He critiques the critical school because it “neglects detailed analysis of the political economy of the media, conceptualizing mass culture merely as an instrument of capitalist ideology” (Kellner, 1990:14). Thus, in addition to looking at television as part of the culture industry, Kellner connects it to both corporate capitalism and the political system. Furthermore, Kellner does not see television as monolithic or as controlled by coherent corporate forces but rather as a “highly conflictual mass medium in which competing economic, political, social and cultural forces intersect” (1990:14). Thus, while working within the tradition of critical theory, Kellner rejects the view that capitalism is a totally administered world. Nevertheless, Kellner sees television as a threat to democracy, individuality, and freedom and offers suggestions (for example, more democratic accountability, greater citizen access and participation, greater diversity on television) to deal with the threat. Thus, Kellner goes beyond a mere critique to offer proposals for dealing with the dangers posed by television. The critical school is also interested in and critical of what it calls the “knowledge industry,” which refers to entities concerned with knowledge production (for example, universities and research institutes) that have become autonomous structures in our society. Their autonomy has allowed them to extend themselves beyond their original mandate (Schroyer, 1970). They have become oppressive structures interested in expanding their influence throughout society. Marx’s critical analysis of capitalism led him to have hope for the future, but many critical theorists have come to a position of despair and hopelessness. They see the problems of the modern world not as specific to capitalism but as endemic to a rationalized world. They see the future, in Weberian terms, as an “iron cage” of increasingly rational structures from which hope for escape lessens all the time. Much of critical theory (like the bulk of Marx’s original formulation) is in the form of critical analyses. Even though the critical theorists also have a number of positive interests, one of the basic criticisms made of critical theory is that it offers more criticisms than it does positive contributions. This incessant negativity

galls many scholars, and for this reason they feel that critical theory has little to offer to sociological theory.

Topic 72: Subjectivity

The great contribution of the critical school has been its effort to reorient Marxian theory in a subjective direction. Although this constitutes a critique of Marx's materialism and his dogged focus on economic structures, it also represents a strong contribution to our understanding of the subjective elements of social life at both the individual and the cultural levels. The Hegelian roots of Marxian theory are the major source of interest in subjectivity. Many of the critical thinkers see themselves as returning to those roots, as expressed in Marx's early works. In doing so, they are following up on the work of the early-twentieth-century Marxian revisionists, such as Georg Lukács, who sought not to focus on subjectivity but simply to integrate such an interest with the traditional Marxian concern with objective structures (Agger, 1978). Lukács did not seek a fundamental restructuring of Marxian theory, although the later critical theorists do have this broader and more ambitious objective. We begin with the critical school's interest in culture. As pointed out above, the critical school has shifted to a concern with the cultural "superstructure" rather than with the economic "base." One factor motivating this shift is that the critical school feels that Marxists have overemphasized economic structures and that this emphasis has served to overwhelm their interest in the other aspects of social reality, especially the culture. In addition to this factor, a series of external changes in society point to such a shift (Agger, 1978). In particular, the prosperity of the post-World War II period in America seems to have led to a disappearance of internal economic contradictions in general and class conflict in particular. False consciousness seems to be nearly universal: all social classes, including the working class, appear to be beneficiaries and ardent supporters of the capitalist system. In addition, the former Soviet Union, despite its socialist economy, was at least as oppressive as capitalist society. Because the two societies had different economies, the critical thinkers had to look elsewhere for the major source of oppression. What they looked toward initially was culture. To the previously discussed aspects of the Frankfurt school's concerns—rationality, the culture industry, and the knowledge industry—can be added another set of concerns, the most notable of which is an interest in ideology. By ideology the critical theorists mean the idea systems, often false and obfuscating, produced by societal elites. All these specific aspects of the superstructure and the critical school's orientation to them can be subsumed under the heading "critique of domination" (Agger, 1978; Schroyer, 1973). This interest in domination was at first stimulated by fascism in the 1930s and 1940s, but it has shifted to a concern with domination in capitalist society. The modern world has reached a stage of unsurpassed domination of individuals. In fact, the control is so complete that it no longer requires deliberate actions on the part of the leaders. The control pervades all aspects of the cultural world and, more important, is internalized in the actor. In effect, actors have come to dominate themselves in the name of the larger social structure. Domination has reached a complete stage where it no longer appears to be domination at all. Because domination is no longer perceived as personally damaging and alienating, it often seems as if the world is the way it is supposed to be. It is no longer clear to actors what the world ought to be like. Thus, the pessimism of the critical thinkers is buttressed because they no longer can see how rational analysis can help alter the situation. One of the critical school's concerns at the cultural level is with what Habermas

(1975) called legitimations. These can be defined as systems of ideas generated by the political system, and theoretically by any other system, to support the existence of the system. They are designed to “mystify” the political system, to make it unclear exactly what is happening. In addition to such cultural interests, the critical school is concerned with actors and their consciousness and what happens to them in the modern world. The consciousness of the masses came to be controlled by external forces (such as the culture industry). As a result, the masses failed to develop a revolutionary consciousness. Unfortunately, the critical theorists, like most Marxists and most sociologists, often fail to differentiate clearly between individual consciousness and culture or specify the many links between them. In much of their work, they move freely back and forth between consciousness and culture with little or no sense that they are changing levels. Of great importance here is the effort by critical theorists, most notably Marcuse (1969), to integrate Freud’s insights at the level of consciousness (and unconsciousness) into the critical theorists’ interpretation of the culture. Critical theorists derive three things from Freud’s work: (1) a psychological structure to work with in developing their theories, (2) a sense of psychopathology that allows them to understand both the negative impact of modern society and the failure to develop revolutionary consciousness, and (3) the possibilities of psychic liberation (G. Friedman, 1981). One of the benefits of this interest in individual consciousness is that it offers a useful corrective to the pessimism of the critical school and its focus on cultural constraints. Although people are controlled, imbued with false needs, and anesthetized, in Freudian terms they also are endowed with a libido (broadly conceived as sexual energy), which provides the basic source of energy for creative action oriented toward the overthrow of the major forms of domination.

Topic 73: Dialectics

The second main positive focus of critical theory is an interest in dialectics (this idea is critiqued from the viewpoint of analytical Marxism later in this chapter). At the most general level, a dialectical approach means a focus on the social totality. 3 “No partial aspect of social life and no isolated phenomenon may be comprehended unless it is related to the historical whole, to the social structure conceived as a global entity” (Connerton, 1976:12). This approach involves rejection of a focus on any specific aspect of social life, especially the economic system, outside of its broader context. This approach also entails a concern with the interrelation of the various levels of social reality—most important, individual consciousness, the cultural superstructure, and the economic structure. Dialectics also carries with it a methodological prescription: One component of social life cannot be studied in isolation from the rest. This idea has both diachronic and synchronic components. A synchronic view leads us to be concerned with the interrelationship of components of society within a contemporary totality. A diachronic view carries with it a concern for the historical roots of today’s society as well as for where it might be going in the future (Bauman, 1976). The domination of people by social and cultural structures—the “one-dimensional” society, to use Marcuse’s phrase—is the result of a specific historical development and is not a universal characteristic of humankind. This historical perspective counteracts the commonsense view that emerges in capitalism that the system is a natural and inevitable phenomenon. In the view of the critical theorists (and other Marxists), people have come to see society as “second nature”; it is “perceived by commonsensical wisdom as an alien, uncompromising, demanding and high-handed power— exactly like non-human nature. To abide

by the rules of reason, to behave rationally, to achieve success, to be free, man now had to accommodate himself to the ‘second nature’” (Bauman, 1976:6). The critical theorists also are oriented to thinking about the future, but following Marx’s lead, they refuse to be utopian; rather, they focus on criticizing and changing contemporary society (Alway, 1995a). However, instead of directing their attention to society’s economic structure as Marx had done, they concentrate on its cultural superstructure. Their dialectical approach commits them to work in the real world. They are not satisfied with seeking truth in scientific laboratories. The ultimate test of their ideas is the degree to which they are accepted and used in practice. This process they call authentication, which occurs when the people who have been the victims of distorted communication take up the ideas of critical theory and use them to free themselves from that system (Bauman, 1976:104). Thus we arrive at another aspect of the concerns of the critical thinkers—the liberation of humankind (Marcuse, 1964:222). In more abstract terms, critical thinkers can be said to be preoccupied with the interplay and relationship between theory and practice. The view of the Frankfurt school was that the two have been severed in capitalist society (Schroyer, 1973:28). That is, theorizing is done by one group, which is delegated, or more likely takes, that right, whereas practice is relegated to another, less powerful group. In many cases, the theorist’s work is uninformed by what went on in the real world, leading to an impoverished and largely irrelevant body of Marxian and sociological theory. The point is to unify theory and practice so as to restore the relationship between them. Theory thus would be informed by practice, whereas practice would be shaped by theory. In the process, both theory and practice would be enriched. Despite this avowed goal, most of critical theory has failed abysmally to integrate theory and practice. In fact, one of the most often voiced criticisms of critical theory is that it usually is written in such a way that it is totally inaccessible to the mass of people. Furthermore, in its commitment to studying culture and superstructure, critical theory addresses a number of very esoteric topics and has little to say about the pragmatic, day-to-day concerns of most people.

Lesson 19**Critical theory: Juregen Habermas-I (Topic 74-76)****Topic 74: Juregen Habermas Differences with Marx**

Although critical theory may be on the decline, Jurgen Habermas and his theories are very much alive (J. Bernstein, 1995; R. Brown and Goodman, 2001; Outhwaite, 1994). We touched on a few of his ideas earlier in this chapter, but here we present a more detailed look at his theory (still other aspects of his thinking are covered in Chapters 14 and 15). Habermas contends that his goal has been “to develop a theoretical program that I understand as a reconstruction of historical materialism” (1979:95). Habermas takes Marx’s starting point (human potential, species-being, “sensuous human activity”) as his own. However, Habermas (1971) argues that Marx failed to distinguish between two analytically distinct components of species-being—work (or labor, purposive-rational action) and social (or symbolic) interaction (or communicative action). In Habermas’s view, Marx tended to ignore the latter and to reduce it to work. As Habermas put it, the problem in Marx’s work is the “reduction of the self-generative act of the human species to labor” (1971:42). Thus, Habermas says: “I take as my starting point the fundamental distinction between work and interaction” (1970:91). Throughout his writings, Habermas’s work is informed by this distinction, although he is most prone to use the terms purposive-rational action (work) and communicative action (interaction). Under the heading “purposive-rational action,” Habermas distinguishes between instrumental action and strategic action. Both involve the calculated pursuit of self interest. Instrumental action involves a single actor rationally calculating the best means to a given goal. Strategic action involves two or more individuals coordinating purposive-rational action in the pursuit of a goal. The objective of both instrumental and strategic action is instrumental mastery. Habermas is most interested in communicative action, in which the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding. In communicative action participants are not primarily oriented to their own successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions. (Habermas, 1984:286; italics added) Whereas the end of purposive-rational action is to achieve a goal, the objective of communicative action is to achieve communicative understanding (Sean Stryker, 1998). Clearly, there is an important speech component in communicative action. However, such action is broader than that encompassing “speech acts or equivalent nonverbal expressions” (Habermas, 1984:278). Habermas’s key point of departure from Marx is to argue that communicative action, not purposive-rational action (work), is the most distinctive and most pervasive human phenomenon. It (not work) is the foundation of all sociocultural life as well as all the human sciences. Whereas Marx was led to focus on work, Habermas is led to focus on communication. Not only did Marx focus on work, he took free and creative work (species-being) as his baseline for critically analyzing work in various historical epochs, especially capitalism. Habermas, too, adopts a baseline, but in the realm of communicative rather than in that of purposive-rational action. Habermas’s baseline is undistorted communication, communication without compulsion. With this baseline, Habermas is able to critically analyze distorted communication. Habermas is concerned with those social

structures that distort communication, just as Marx examined the structural sources of the distortion of work. Although they have different baselines, both Habermas and Marx have baselines, and these permit them to escape relativism and render judgments about various historical phenomena. Habermas is critical of those theorists, especially Weber and previous critical theorists, for their lack of such a baseline and their lapse into relativism. There is still another parallel between Marx and Habermas and their baselines. For both, these baselines represent not only their analytical starting points but also their political objectives. That is, whereas for Marx the goal was a communist society in which undistorted work (species-being) would exist for the first time, for Habermas the political goal is a society of undistorted communication (communicative action). In terms of immediate goals, Marx seeks the elimination of (capitalist) barriers to undistorted work and Habermas is interested in the elimination of barriers to free communication. Here Habermas (1973; see also Habermas, 1994:101), like other critical theorists, draws on Freud and sees many parallels between what psychoanalysts do at the individual level and what he thinks needs to be done at the societal level. Habermas sees psychoanalysis as a theory of distorted communication and as being preoccupied with allowing individuals to communicate in an undistorted way. The psychoanalyst seeks to find the sources of distortions in individual communication, that is, repressed blocks to communication. Through reflection, the psychoanalyst attempts to help the individual overcome these blocks. Similarly, through therapeutic critique, “a form of argumentation that serves to clarify systematic self-deception” (Habermas, 1984:21), the critical theorist attempts to aid people in general to overcome social barriers to undistorted communication. There is, then, an analogy (many critics think an illegitimate analogy) between psychoanalysis and critical theory. The psychoanalyst aids the patient in much the same way that the social critic helps those unable to communicate adequately to become “undisabled” (Habermas, 1994:112). As for Marx, the basis of Habermas’s ideal future society exists in the contemporary world. That is, for Marx elements of species-being are found in work in capitalist society. For Habermas, elements of undistorted communication are found in every act of contemporary communication.

Topic 75-76: The legitimization crisis in the political organization of capitalism

Like the other Frankfurt School theorists, Habermas focused heavily on the process whereby political and economic systems are legitimated through cultural beliefs, ideologies, and worldviews. However, modern capitalist societies face a legitimization crisis as a result of the long-term transformation from the early forms of entrepreneurial capitalism to modern organized capitalism (Habermas, 1975). This crisis is expressed in contemporary debates regarding the scope of the government’s role in society. Its origins lie in part in resistance to the tremendous expansion of the role of government in modern democratic societies. This expansion, accompanying the growth of capitalist enterprises themselves, was triggered in part by the need to deal with the periodic economic crises of capitalism. It also includes the government’s increased role in meeting the basic welfare needs that inevitably develop in unregulated market systems. However, the pattern of increasing government regulation is inconsistent with a political ideology that insists on limiting government power for the sake of individual freedom. The goal of limiting traditional restrictions on individual freedom had been important in the early years of capitalism for the development of political democracy. The resulting overthrow of traditional

constraints and forms of domination had opened the door for the early development of entrepreneurial capitalism. The result was the separation (or “uncoupling”) of economic activity from political control. The expansion of the role and scope of government that accompanied the expansion of capitalist enterprises was justified in terms of the need to insure economic stability and protect the general welfare. The goal of stability was crucial for capitalist enterprises, while the general welfare goal was important for providing some protection for individual citizens from the growing power of these large-scale corporate enterprises. The overall results of this process were seen by Habermas as a “recoupling” of economic activity and political regulation. Even though justified in terms of the general welfare, a lot of the expansion of government programs and regulations occurred without widespread democratic discussion or clear consensus regarding the proper role of government in insuring the general welfare in a complex society. The long-term outcome was that government policies often seemed to benefit particular groups or “special interests” more than the general welfare. While critical theory is oriented toward increasing individual freedom, the question of when restrictions are needed to prevent exploitation and promote the overall welfare of society are always matters of political debate. The problem in modern societies is that public participation in such discussion tends to be limited and one-sided. This lack of citizen participation makes it possible for large-scale corporate structures to have an inordinate influence on public discourse and political policy decisions. The restrictions and distortions in the communication process in modern society result in part from heavy reliance on impersonal “steering mechanisms” as a source of control and integration of large-scale complex systems. This leads us to Habermas’s (1987) important distinction between system and lifeworld. Modern societies differ from earlier types of society in terms of their heavy reliance on impersonal procedures of macro-level system integration. Moreover, these mechanisms have become detached (or “uncoupled”) from the micro-level processes whereby people’s everyday life worlds are integrated through open communication leading to mutual understandings and the possibility of well-informed consensus. This discrepancy between system integration based on impersonal steering mechanisms and social integration based on communication results in large part from the growing size and complexity of society. Habermas related his distinction between system and lifeworld to the ideas of several theorists discussed in earlier chapters. His analysis of the system is consistent with Durkheim’s argument regarding the effects of the expansion of the division of labor in increasing functional interdependence while simultaneously decreasing moral solidarity. This process can also be related to Marx’s description of how social ties between members of different socioeconomic classes have been replaced by purely market transactions (or a narrow “cash nexus”). Habermas also incorporated Weber’s insights regarding the effects of the strong emphasis on formal rationality of modern society in creating a kind of “iron cage” of administrative efficiency (or instrumental rationality) that undermines concerns with ultimate values or socioemotional expressive needs. Habermas’s discussion of the everyday lifeworld drew on the phenomenological perspective of Schutz and Luckmann in highlighting the importance of implicitly shared and taken-for-granted assumptions and stocks of knowledge that are sustained through patterns of micro-level communication. This implicit knowledge provides the underlying foundation for people’s ability to make sense of one another’s actions and to participate in the social world in a meaningful way. Habermas incorporated Mead’s analysis of the importance of communication in enabling people to expand their mutual understanding. He relates this micro

level focus to Durkheim's explanation of how moral solidarity is developed and reinforced when people come together to participate in shared rituals. Although Mead focused more on pragmatic adaptation to the environment than ritual action, he recognized the importance of the social solidarity that emerges through communication for promoting normative consensus. The ritual actions and forms of communication that Durkheim emphasized can be seen as helping in a major way to reinforce such consensus. While micro-level lifeworlds are integrated through communicative action oriented toward the goal of mutual understanding, the integration of macro-level social systems makes use of money and power as "steering mechanisms" that are independent of the subjective (or intersubjective) orientations developed and sustained through communication at the lifeworld level. Money is the key medium for the economy and the market system while power is crucial for the polity and the organization of government at all levels.¹⁶

Both money and power can be deployed in ways that shape human beings' actions without the type of mutual understanding that can be established only through communication. Reliance on these steering mechanisms makes possible the "uncoupling" of macro-level economic and political systems from the lifeworlds individuals share at the micro-level. In addition to the "uncoupling" of system and lifeworld, Habermas argues also that the dynamics and demands of the system have invaded and colonized the lifeworld, restricting and distorting the type of open communication that leads to mutual understanding. Thus the fate of individuals, of families, and of local communities is subject to governmental or corporate decisions that are often far removed from local lifeworld scenes. For the society as a whole, basic policy decisions are made by political and administrative elites, with individuals having little meaningful input in comparison to various corporate or organized "special interests." Habermas' critical perspective is based on a systematic analysis of different forms of communication reflecting contrasting types of rationality. Weber's focus on instrumental rationality based on means/ends relations is limited in Habermas's view; the broader view of rationality that he proposes is grounded in a more comprehensive perspective as manifested in different ways in alternative forms of discourse. In this broader view, statements that are able to withstand criticism when their validity claims are challenged may be said to be rational, as opposed to those that cannot withstand criticism. But there are different criteria by which the implicit validity claims of different types of statements can be criticized or defended. The formal or instrumental rationality that Weber saw as prevailing in bureaucratic organizations and authority systems represents a limited form of rationality which is concerned only with the effectiveness and efficiency of the means employed to achieve objective ends.

Lesson 20**Critical theory: Juregen Habermas-II (Topic 77-79)****Topic 77-79: Alternative forms of communication and rationality**

Rationality for Habermas is grounded in the communication process whereby people become more reflective regarding their implicit and taken-for-granted common sense assumptions (Habermas, 1973). Such discourse, in the absence of coercion or other restrictions on communication, may lead to questioning and criticizing beliefs and values handed down through tradition and accepted implicitly as “just the way things are.” Different forms of communication can be distinguished according to whether they concern the objective world, the intersubjective world, the subjective (or personal) world, or the communication process itself as topics of discourse. Each of these different forms of discourse is associated with its own distinctive type of rationality and its own specific type of action. The four types of action include purposive (or teleological) action, normative action, dramaturgic action, and communicative action (Habermas, 1984:84–87). The kinds of statements associated with these different types of rational action are summarized below.

1. Factual statements and purposive (or teleological) action—Rationality in this area is reflected in the methods of scientific research whereby statements are evaluated against objective empirical facts. The claim that sociology is a science is problematic, however, inasmuch as the social world includes people’s subjective experiences, sentiments, beliefs, attitudes, and so on that are not part of the external world—even though the subjective states of other people are clearly external to any particular observer, including sociological observers. Purposive or teleological action employs objective factual knowledge in selecting means to achieve goals. This type of action corresponds to Weber’s instrumental rationality and is also consistent with the rational choice perspective as described in earlier chapters. Rationality considerations are involved in assessing the effectiveness or efficiency of means in reaching whatever ends are being sought. Habermas uses the concept of strategic action to refer to efforts to influence other people’s actions as the means for achieving one’s own ends. This form of relating to others is not oriented toward reaching mutual understanding. Strategic action is exemplified in market relations, with buyers and sellers interacting or negotiating with one another in terms of the individual interests they seek to satisfy. It is also manifested in authority relations in organizations, where controlling the actions of subordinates is simply the means for achieving the goals of an organization or those of the authority figures within it.

2. Normative statements and normative action—Rationality in this area involves evaluating behaviors in terms of their conformity with widely accepted norms. Such actions may also fulfill various goals for oneself or for others, but this is not the primary motivation. Instead, the focus is on the norms themselves and the ideals and values they reflect. Communication in this category may include efforts to establish consensus or to evaluate the norms critically. This type of communication is particularly important for the critical theory goal of changing normative patterns and institutionalized structures so as to improve human welfare.

3. Expressive statements and dramaturgical action—Expressive statements reflect one’s own personal subjective orientations and intentions. They cannot be evaluated by “checking the facts,”

since the “facts” are subjective in nature, and their validity also does not depend on social consensus. Rationality with regard to expressive communication would involve discourse that seeks to discover and correct patterns of deliberate deceit or unwitting self-delusion or to improve self-disclosure. This type of action would include dramaturgical action, including the various strategies of presentation of self as analyzed by Goffman that were reviewed in Chap. 5. If a person’s self-presentation is intended to manipulate the behavior of others to benefit oneself, it could be seen as a form of strategic action as well. Even if sincere, there are variations in the level of self-disclosure involved in different forms of dramaturgic action. A high level of systematic and disciplined expressive self-disclosure is represented by those involved in the creation of cultural products such as art, music, and literature. The goal of these forms of creativity is to communicate a subjective or experiential response to some aspect of the human condition. Expressive communication of this type can be evaluated in terms of intersubjectively shared aesthetic standards. Rational analysis of the meaning of such cultural products would involve evaluating how well they represent common human experiences or convey a meaningful reaction to the human condition that can be shared.

4. Communication and communicative action—Discourse in this category goes beyond establishing facts, norms, or internal sentiments and is oriented explicitly toward communicative competence and mutual understanding. It would include analysis of the grammatical structure of sentences, paragraphs, texts, and speeches, for example, as well as the expressed or implied meanings carried through different forms of communication. Since the goal of communicative action is mutual understanding, this type of action contrasts sharply with purposive or instrumental action as described above. In coordinating people’s actions, consensus based on mutual understanding may be contrasted with force, tradition, authority, or manipulation as a basis for control. Habermas relates these forms of communication and rationality to personality formation, social integration, and the creation and reproduction of cultural meanings and values. His discussion of the socialization process draws heavily on Mead’s theory regarding the development of one’s self-concept and also on developmental psychologist Jean Piaget’s learning theory. For Habermas, however, Mead’s microlevel focus does not provide an adequate explanation of the overall framework of beliefs and values shared in the larger social world. To provide this larger picture Habermas draws on Durkheim’s theory regarding the way collective rituals reinforce shared meanings and moral codes.

Habermas argues that system integration at the level of the overall society has expanded in modern society at the expense of the social integration of the lifeworld. 18 The process of communication whereby satisfying identities are formed, social solidarity established, and meaningful values sustained at the lifeworld level are overshadowed and swamped by the logic of instrumental action employing the impersonal media of money and power at the macro-system level. The results of such restrictions and distortions may include inadequate levels of socialization, breakdown in normative consensus, and erosion of cultural meanings and values. When such consequences are widespread, the symptoms may include antisocial behavior, disruptive conflict, anomie, and alienation. These problems are more serious than simple misunderstandings that can be corrected through communicative action within individuals’ micro-level life worlds. The way social integration at the lifeworld level is subordinated to system integration can be seen in the economic

system in the growth of a consumer society. In various ways (particularly through advertising), individuals are encouraged to pursue ever increasing levels of personal consumption as the key to a fulfilling life. This lifestyle helps compensate them for their subordinate status and lack of autonomy while their enthusiastic conformity to the consumer role promotes the expansion of the economic system. Within the political structure, system integration is promoted as citizens become clients or beneficiaries of the state through their dependence on government for personal benefits or for policies that will serve their interests. Segments of the population as diverse as senior citizens relying on monthly Social Security checks, students who benefit from government-backed loans, and agricultural producers who receive government support illustrate this pattern of dependence. Paradoxically, the roles of both consumer and citizen are also reinforced through ideologies that simultaneously idealize individual freedom and material success, the “free enterprise” economic system, and government responsibility for the general welfare in a democratic system. From a critical theory perspective, the increased allocation of general welfare responsibilities to the government may be seen as restricting the freedom of individuals and organizations in the private sector in many different ways. Moreover, the limited and subordinate modes of individuals’ involvement in the impersonal structures of the system are not a satisfactory substitute for life world integration based on mutual understanding. Specifically, the macro-level “steering mechanisms” of our economic and political structures do not employ the type of communication that creates and reinforces a sense of community or satisfying personal identities at the level of individuals’ lifeworlds.

The distinction Habermas makes between system and lifeworld, and his emphasis on the growth of the former at the expense of the latter, may be seen as a critique of the long-term erosion of close-knit communities where members are bound together in a shared “lifeworld” that sustains their socioemotional and moral solidarity as well as reinforces their personal identities. With this perspective it is easy to discount the possibilities for social movements to emerge from shared lifeworld experiences that may eventually influence and even transform macro-level institutional processes. The civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the environmental movement, and the gay/lesbian movement illustrate how shared lifeworld experiences have the potential to encourage communication and mobilize people for attempting to influence the larger system. Sometimes, however, this process leads to the establishment of formal organizations, with responsibilities for specific goals delegated to them. But as these organizations grow and become institutionalized, the logic of instrumental rationality is likely to become dominant as these goals are pursued. When this happens, there is a risk that successful goal accomplishment will again be given priority over mutual understanding. Habermas’s emphasis on open communication oriented toward mutual understanding, without restrictions and distortions, is highly idealistic and much more difficult to implement in large-scale systems than in small-scale systems. Even with the new technology of the internet, it is difficult to visualize a “virtual” town hall meeting in which the entire population of a large and complex society could communicate effectively with one another and with government officials or other authority figures representing large-scale institutional structures. In addition to the logistical difficulties, communication would be restricted because the “appropriate” knowledge that is needed to engage in meaningful participation is not likely to be available to all. Habermas’s open communication ideal requires all participants to be competent participants—and recognized as competent. Even in small-scale discussion groups with

people who appear initially to be roughly equal, differences quickly become apparent in their level of knowledge and expertise, as well as their willingness and ability to contribute. Not all voices are heard, and the collective decisions eventually made are likely to reflect the interests of those who dominate the discussion. In large-scale macro systems, subordinates and others in marginal positions are often left out of the discussion, even though they may be affected in major ways by decisions or actions undertaken by agents for macro-level systems.

Lesson 21**Critical theory: Juregen Habermas-III (Topic 80-82)****Topic 80-82: Critical theory today**

While Habermas is the most prominent of today's social thinkers, he is not alone in struggling to develop a critical theory that is better adapted to contemporary realities (see, for example, the various essays in Wexler, 1991; Antonio and Kellner, 1994). Castells (1996) has made the case for the need for a critical theory of the new "information society." To illustrate these continuing efforts, a brief discussion follows of the work of Axel Honneth, especially on the struggle for recognition. The Ideas of Axel Honneth A student of Jurgen Habermas, Axel Honneth (b. 1949) is the current director of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. With Habermas now in retirement, Honneth has emerged as today's leading critical theorist. To achieve that status, he has developed a theoretical position that builds on, but critiques, the work of the critical school as well as that of Habermas in particular (Honneth, 1985/1991, 1990/1995, 1992/1994, 2000/2007, 2008). Honneth's critique of his predecessors, as well as his own theoretical perspective, is based on his fundamental views on the requirements of a critical theory. For one thing, it must be based on and emerge from practical critiques that exist in the everyday world. As Honneth (1990/1995:xii) puts it, the explanation of a social phenomenon must be done "in such a way that a practical dimension of critique emerges as a constitutive requirement for critical understanding." For another, a critical theory must have an interest in emancipating people from the domination and oppression that they experience in the real world. That is, in line with the traditional Marxian perspective, critical theory must have an integrative interest in both theory and practice. It must seek the "determination of the driving forces of society which locates in the historical process itself the impetus both to critique as well as to overcoming established forms of domination (Honneth, 1990/1995:xii). That is, the emancipatory interest of critical theory lies within (is immanent within) society itself. The basic problem with classic critical theory, especially that of Horkheimer and Adorno, is that its totally administered view of the capitalist world led to negativism; it left no hope for practical critique and emancipatory possibilities in the everyday world and in critical theory itself. Of critical theory, Honneth (1990/1995:xii) said that it supposed a "closed circle between capitalist domination and cultural manipulation, that there could remain within the social reality of their time no space for a zone of moral-practical critique." This leads him to the conclusion that the key problem for critical theory today, and therefore for him, is how to come "to grips with the structure of social domination as well as with identifying the social resources for its practical transformation" (Honneth, 1990/1995:xiii). In this context, Honneth sees Habermas's communication theory as a step forward because it offered us a way of dealing with, and getting at, the everyday life-world. In that world there exists "in the form of the normative expectations of interaction—a layer of moral experiences . . . which would serve as the point of reference for an immanent, yet transcending moment of critique" (Honneth, 1990/1995:xiii). But in the end, Honneth did not find that Habermas's work went far enough, especially in the direction of getting at moral reactions and feelings as they exist in everyday life. Thus Honneth seeks to build upon Habermas, but to go farther and in a different direction than that taken by Habermas. While Habermas is concerned with communication, Honneth comes to focus

on the recognition of identity claims made by individuals and collectivities. Consistent with critical theory, he wants to deal with the violence committed against those claims for recognition and the injuries and pathologies that result for the claimants. Individuals and groups come to engage in political resistance not because of some abstract moral principles but because of the “experience of violence to intuitively presupposed conceptions of justice” (Honneth, 1990/1995:xiv). That is, they feel that they deserve recognition. When they do not get it, their sense of fair play is upset, and they come to resist those who are seen as being unfair to them. And “it is principally violence to individual or collective claims to social recognition within the lifeworld which will be experienced as moral injustice” (Honneth, 1990/1995:xv). Critical theorists, including Honneth, must look to the everyday social world for their moral reference points. It is the everyday world that provides “social criticism with a moral foothold” (Honneth, 1990/1995:xv). At the heart of Honneth’s work is an idea—“the struggle for recognition”—derived from Hegel. Honneth finds Hegel’s ideas attractive, not only for their focus on recognition but also because they connect morality to the moral sentiments of people, as well as indicating the way that feelings about a lack of recognition can lead to social action and social conflict. People feel that it is normative for them to receive recognition, and when it is not forthcoming, especially repeatedly, they feel that they have not gotten the respect they deserve. Historically people often have felt that they did not get the recognition they deserved and it is possible, even likely, that there is an increasing crisis of recognition in contemporary society. For example, it is difficult to get recognition for one’s work (especially for women; see Honneth, 2000/2007; 75–77; Rossler, 2007). More generally, there has been a decline in the ability of various institutions (for example, family, work) to create the kinds of recognition people need. More specifically, and also following Hegel, people are seen as needing three forms of recognition from others. First is love, or caring for a person’s needs and emotions. People gain self-confidence when they receive such recognition. Second is respect for a person’s moral and legal dignity, and this leads to self-respect. Finally, there is esteem for a person’s social achievements, and this leads to self-esteem (Van den Brink and Owen, 2007b). These forms of recognition are acquired and maintained intersubjectively (a perspective derived from Mead). That is, in order to relate to themselves in these ways (and have self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem), people must receive recognition from others. Ultimately, “[r]elations of recognition are a necessary condition of our moral subjectivity and agency” (Van den Brink and Owen, 2007b:4–5). It is only with adequate recognition that people can realize their full autonomy as human beings. Disrespect (Honneth, 2000/2007) occurs when people do not receive the recognition they feel they deserve, and this adversely affects their ability to form appropriate identities. Feelings of a lack of respect are not unverifiable feelings but are based on a normative standard that people deserve certain forms of recognition; most generally, they deserve love, respect, and esteem. Conflict and resistance are likely to result when they do not get the recognition the normative system says they should. The existence of such a normative standard not only lies at the base of such actions, but it allows outsiders (including critical theorists) to utilize established norms to evaluate those actions, and the concrete claims for recognition on which those actions are based. That is, Honneth offers us an Archimedean point from which to evaluate claims for recognition; our judgments of the legitimacy of those claims need not be arbitrary. There are at least four major criticisms of Honneth’s critical theory. First, some critics question the placement of recognition at the heart of

a social and ethical theory: Is recognition as important as Honneth suggests? Is it as important as work and labor in Marx's theory or communication in Habermas's theory? Second, there are doubts about the kind of monistic theory created by Honneth: Is recognition all that matters? Third, some question whether there are three bases of recognition: Why not more or less? Finally, it is hard to discern the operations of power in Honneth's theory.

Later Developments in Cultural Critique

Kellner and Lewis (2007) see the Frankfurt school as part of a tradition of work that involves “cultural critique,” which, in turn, is part of the “cultural turn” and cultural studies (McGuigan, 2005; Storey, 2007). At the center of this tradition lies the Frankfurt school, but it is predated by work by Kant, Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud (among others) and is succeeded by later work, especially that associated with the “Birmingham school.” As the name suggests, the Birmingham school, or the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, was associated with the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom (Barker, 2007). Founded in 1964, it remained in existence until 1988. Created by Richard Hoggart, the center gained its greatest fame and coherence as a center of cultural studies under the leadership of Stuart Hall (Rojek, 2003, 2005). In contrast to the literary tradition in England, which privileged and valued high art and the elite classes, the Birmingham school valued and focused on popular culture, its products, and the lower classes with which they are associated. Furthermore, popular culture was seen as the arena in which hegemonic ideas operated as mechanisms of social control, were consented to, and, most important from a Marxian perspective, were resisted by the lower classes. Concepts like hegemonic ideas, consent, and resistance clearly aligned the Birmingham school with Marxian theory, especially the theories of Antonio Gramsci (although structuralism and semiotics influenced at least some of its work). An ideological struggle was in existence, and as “organic intellectuals” (thinkers who were, at least theoretically, part of the working class) it was the responsibility (if not always fulfilled) of the Birmingham scholars to be part of popular culture and help those associated with it wage a counter-hegemonic ideological battle against those in power. They also saw as their role the debunking and demystification of dominant texts with their abundant ideologies and myths that served the interests of elites. They were not disinterested social scientists but rather “populists” who sided with the “people” against the power elite (McGuigan, 2002, 2005). Thus, like the critical theorists, those associated with the Birmingham school moved away from economic determinism and a base-superstructure perspective and toward an emphasis on the superstructure, especially culture (as well as the nation-state), which was seen as relatively autonomous of the economic base. At that level of culture, the focus was on ideology and hegemony and on the ways that power and control manifested itself and was resisted. This meant a concern, on the one hand, with how the media expressed ideologies of the dominant groups and how working-class youth reproduced their subordinate position and, on the other hand, with how working-class youth resisted that position and the ideology of the dominant groups through such things as dress and style (for example, the “skinheads”). Relatedly, the Birmingham school was interested in analyzing a variety of texts films, advertisements, soap operas, news broadcasts—in order to show how they were hegemonic products and how their meanings were not fixed but rather were produced in various, sometimes antithetical or oppositional, ways by the audience. Again, this was a reflection of the school's dual concern with

hegemony and resistance. The power of the lower classes to redefine culture in antithetical and oppositional ways was related to a major difference between the Birmingham school and the Frankfurt school. The latter saw culture as debased by the culture industry; the former saw that as an elitist perspective. The Birmingham school had a much more positive view of culture, especially as it was interpreted and produced by the lower classes.

Lesson 22**Feminism as part of conflict perspective-I (Topic 83-86)****Topic 83: The challenge of feminist theory Introduction**

Beginning in the late 1970s, precisely at the moment when Marxian sociology gained significant acceptance from American sociologists, a new theoretical outsider issued a challenge to established sociological theories—and even to Marxian sociology itself. This latest brand of radical social thought is contemporary feminist theory (Rogers, 2001). In Western societies, one can trace the record of critical feminist writings back almost 500 years, and there has been an organized political movement by and for women for more than 150 years. In America in 1920, the movement finally won the right for women to vote, fifty-five years after that right had been constitutionally extended to all men. Exhausted and to a degree satiated by victory, the American women's movement over the next thirty years weakened in both size and vigor, only to spring back to life, fully reawakened, in the 1960s. Three factors helped create this new wave of feminist activism: (1) the general climate of critical thinking that characterized the period; (2) the anger of women activists who flocked to the antiwar, civil rights, and student movements only to encounter the sexist attitudes of the liberal and radical men in those movements (Densimore, 1973; Evans, 1980; Morgan, 1970; Shreve, 1989); and (3) women's experience of prejudice and discrimination as they moved in ever-larger numbers into wage work and higher education (Bookman and Morgen, 1988; Garland, 1988). For these reasons, particularly the last one, the women's movement continued into the twenty-first century, even though the activism of many other 1960s movements faded. Moreover, during these years activism by and for women became an international phenomenon, drawing in women from many societies. Feminist writing has now entered its "third wave" in the writings of women who will spend most of their adult lives in the twenty-first century (C. Bailey, 1997; Orr, 1997). The most significant recent change in the women's movement has been the emergence among activist women of both a feminist and an antifeminist movement (Fraser 1989). A major feature of this international women's movement has been an explosively growing new literature on women that makes visible all aspects of women's hitherto unconsidered lives and experiences. This literature, which is popularly referred to as women's studies, is the work of an international and interdisciplinary community of writers, located both within and outside universities and writing for both the general public and specialized academic audiences. Feminist scholars have launched a probing, multifaceted critique that makes visible the complexity of the system that subordinates women. Feminist theory is the theoretical strand running through this literature: sometimes implicit in writings on such substantive issues as work or rape or popular culture; sometimes centrally and explicitly presented, as in the analyses of motherhood; and increasingly the sole, systematic project of a piece of writing. Of this recent spate of wholly theoretical writing, certain statements have been particularly salient to sociology because they are directed to sociologists by people well versed in sociological theory. Journals such as *Signs*, *Feminist Studies*, *Sociological Inquiry*, and *Gender & Society* bring feminist theory to the attention of sociologists; however, there is hardly a sociological journal that could not be called pro-feminist.

Feminist theory looks at the world from the vantage points of women, with an eye to discovering the significant but unacknowledged ways in which the activities of women—subordinated by gender and variously affected by other stratificational practices, such as class, race, age, enforced heterosexuality, and geosocial inequality—help create our world. This viewpoint dramatically reworks our understanding of social life. From this base, feminist theorists have begun to challenge sociological theory, especially its classical statements and early research. Feminist writings now assume a critical mass in sociology. They offer an exciting paradigm for the study of social life. And those whose experiences and perceptions make them a receptive audience for this theory—women in general and both women and men affected by feminism in particular—may now constitute a numerical majority in the sociological community. For all these reasons, implications of feminist theory are moving increasingly into the mainstream of the discipline; engaging all its subspecialties; influencing many of its long-established theories, both macro and micro; and interacting with the new poststructuralist and postmodernist developments described below.

Topic 84-85: Feminism's basic questions

Feminist theory is a generalized, wide-ranging system of ideas about social life and human experience developed from a woman-centered perspective. Feminist theory is woman-centered—or women-centered—in two ways. First, the starting point of all its investigation is the situation (or the situations) and experiences of women in society. Second, it seeks to describe the social world from the distinctive vantage points of women. Feminist theory differs from most sociological theories in that it is the work of an interdisciplinary and international community of scholars, artists, and activists. 1 Feminist sociologists seek to broaden and deepen sociology by reworking disciplinary knowledge to take account of discoveries being made by this interdisciplinary community. We begin the chapter by outlining the basic questions guiding feminist scholarship. Next we provide a brief history of the relation between feminism and sociology; then we describe the various types of contemporary feminist theory, emphasizing the contributions of sociologists to those theories. We conclude the chapter with an integrated statement of feminist sociological theorizing as it is developing out of these various theoretical traditions.

The impetus for contemporary feminist theory begins in a deceptively simple question: “And what about the women?” In other words, where are the women in any situation being investigated? If they are not present, why? If they are present, what exactly are they doing? How do they experience the situation? What do they contribute to it? What does it mean to them? In response to this question, feminist scholarship has produced some generalizable answers. Women are present in most social situations. Where they are not, it is not because they lack ability or interest but because there have been deliberate efforts to exclude them. Where they have been present, women have played roles very different from the popular conception of them (as, for example, passive wives and mothers). Indeed, as wives and as mothers and in a series of other roles, women, along with men, have actively created the situations being studied. Yet though women are actively present in most social situations, scholars, publics, and social actors themselves, both male and female, have been blind to their presence. Moreover, women's roles in most social situations,

though essential, have been different from, less privileged than, and subordinate to the roles of men. Their invisibility is only one indicator of this inequality. Feminism's second basic question is: "Why is all this as it is?" In answering this question, feminist theory has produced a general social theory with broad implications for sociology. One of feminist sociological theory's major contributions to answering this question has been the development of the concept of gender. Beginning in the 1970s, feminist theorists made it possible for people to see the distinctions between (a) biologically determined attributes associated with male and female and (b) the socially learned behaviors associated with masculinity and femininity. They did so by designating the latter as "gender." 2 The essential qualities of gender remain a point of theoretical debate in feminism, and these debates offer one way to distinguish among some of the varieties of feminist theory. But a starting point of agreement among nearly all varieties of feminist theory is an understanding of gender as a social construction, something not emanating from nature but created by people as part of the processes of group life. The third question for all feminists is: "How can we change and improve the social world so as to make it a more just place for all people?" This commitment to social transformation in the interest of justice is the distinctive characteristic of critical social theory, a commitment shared in sociology by feminism, Marxism, neo-Marxism, and social theories being developed by racial and ethnic minorities and in postcolonial societies. Patricia Hill Collins (1998:xiv) forcefully states the importance of this commitment to seeking justice and confronting injustice: "Critical social theory encompasses bodies of knowledge . . . that actively grapple with the central questions facing groups of people differently placed in specific political, social, and historic contexts characterized by injustice." This commitment to critical theorizing requires that feminist theorists ask how their work will improve the daily lives of the people they study. As the circle of feminists exploring these questions has become more inclusive of people of diverse backgrounds both in the United States and internationally, feminist theorists have raised a fourth question: "And what about the differences among women?" The answers to this question lead to a general conclusion that the invisibility, inequality, and role differences in relation to men that generally characterize women's lives are profoundly affected by a woman's social location—that is, by her class, race, age, affectional preference, marital status, religion, ethnicity, and global location. But feminist theory is not just about women, nor is its major project the creation of a middle-range theory of gender relations. Rather, the appropriate parallel for feminism's major theoretical achievement is to one of Marx's epistemological accomplishments. Marx showed that the knowledge people had of society, what they assumed to be an absolute and universal statement about reality, in fact reflected the experience of those who economically and politically ruled the world; he effectively demonstrated that one also could view the world from the vantage point of the world's workers. This insight relativized ruling-class knowledge and, in allowing us to juxtapose that knowledge with knowledge gained from the workers' perspective, vastly expanded our ability to analyze social reality. More than a century after Marx's death we are still assimilating the implications of this discovery. Feminism's basic theoretical questions have similarly produced a revolutionary switch in our understanding of the world: what we have taken as universal and absolute knowledge of the world is, in fact, knowledge derived from the experiences of a powerful section of society, men as "masters." That knowledge is relativized if we rediscover the world from the vantage point of a hitherto invisible, unacknowledged "underside": women, who in subordinated but indispensable "serving" roles

have worked to sustain and re-create the society we live in. This discovery raises questions about everything we thought we knew about society, and its implications constitute the essence of contemporary feminist theory's significance for sociological theory. Feminist theory deconstructs established systems of knowledge by showing their masculinist bias and the gender politics framing and informing them. To say that knowledge is "deconstructed" is to say that we discover what was hitherto hidden behind the presentation of the knowledge as established, singular, and natural—namely, that that presentation is a construction resting on social, relational, and power arrangements. But feminism itself has become the subject of relativizing and deconstructionist pressures from within its own theoretical boundaries. The first and more powerful of these pressures comes from women confronting the white, privileged-class, heterosexual status of many leading feminists—that is, from women of color, women in postcolonial societies, working-class women, and lesbians. These women, speaking from "margin to center" (hooks, 1984), show that there are many differently situated women, and that there are many women-centered knowledge systems that oppose both established, male-stream knowledge claims and any hegemonic feminist claims about a unitary woman's standpoint. The second deconstructionist pressure within feminism comes from a growing postmodernist literature that raises questions about gender as an undifferentiated concept and about the individual self as a stable locus of consciousness and personhood from which gender and the world are experienced. The potential impact of these questions falls primarily on feminist epistemology—its system for making truth claims—and is explored more fully below.

Topic 86: Waves of feminism

Feminism and sociology share a long-standing relationship originating in feminists turning to sociology to answer feminism's foundational questions: what about the women, why is all this as it is, how can it be changed to produce a more just society, and, more recently, what about differences among women? Sociology was identified from its beginning by activist women as one possible source of explanation and change. One strand of this history has been women sociologists' identifying and conceptualizing gender as both a descriptive and at least partially explanatory variable in their answers, providing a tool for separating biological maleness and femaleness from social masculinity and femininity (Feree, Khan, and Morimoto, 2007; Finlay, 2007; Tarrant, 2006). Feminism and sociology need to be understood both as systems of ideas and as social organizations—for feminism, this means as a theory and as a social movement; for sociology, as an academic discipline and as a profession. Looked at in this way, we find that women, most of whom were feminist in their understandings, were active in the development of sociology as both a discipline and a profession from its beginnings, and that repeatedly, generation after generation, these women have had their achievements erased from the history of sociology by a male-dominated professional elite (Delamont, 2003; Skeggs, 2008; for a detailed examination of this process see Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1998). Despite such erasures, the feminist perspective is an enduring feature of social life. Wherever women are subordinated—and they have been subordinated almost always and everywhere—they have recognized and protested that situation (Lerner, 1993). In the Western world, published works of protest appeared as a thin but persistent trickle from the 1630s to about 1780. Since then feminist writing has been a significant collective effort, growing in both the number of its participants and the scope of its critique (Cott,

1977; Donovan, 1985; Giddings, 1984; Lerner, 1993; Alice Rossi, 1974; Spender, 1982, 1983). Feminist writing is linked to feminist social activism, which has varied in intensity over the last two hundred years; high points occur in the liberationist “moments” of modern Western history. In U.S. history, major periods of feminist mobilization frequently are understood as “waves.”

First Wave feminism began in the 1830s as an offshoot of the antislavery movement and focused on women’s struggle for political rights, especially the vote. It is marked by two key dates—1848, when the first women’s rights convention was held at Seneca Falls, New York, and 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment gave women the right to vote.

Second Wave feminism (ca. 1960–1990) worked to translate these basic political rights into economic and social equality and to reconceptualize relations between men and women with the concept “gender.”

Third Wave feminism is used in two senses—to describe the responses by women of color, lesbians, and working-class women to the ideas of white professional women claiming to be the voice of Second Wave feminism (Feree, 2009) and to describe the feminist ideas of the generation of women who will live their adult lives in the twenty-first century. Feminist ideas were, thus, abroad in the world in the 1830s when Auguste Comte coined the term “sociology” and feminist Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) was asked to edit a proposed journal in “sociology.” Martineau is an important player in the history of sociology whose work has only been recovered under the impact of Second Wave feminism (Deegan, 1991; Hill, 1989; Hoecker-Drysdale, 1994; Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1998; Niebrugge, Lengermann, and Dickerson, 2010) and whose contribution undergirds the claim that women were “present at the creation” of sociology (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1998). Sociology’s development into an organized discipline in its “classic generation”—the period marked by white male thinkers who did significant work from 1890 to 1920 (e.g., Emile Durkheim [1858–1917] and Max Weber [1862–1920] overlapped with the rise in activism in First Wave feminism as women pushed their crusade for the right to vote). Feminists Jane Addams, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Florence Kelley, and Marianne Weber played important roles in the development of sociology, creating theory, inventing research methods, publishing in sociological journals, belonging to sociological associations, and holding offices in professional associations—and directly or indirectly speaking from the standpoint of women. United States women of color Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, though barred by racist practices from full participation in the organization of sociology, developed both social theory and a powerful practice of sociological critique and activism. Gilman is particularly significant in the history of feminist contributions to sociology, providing the first conceptualization of what will become the idea of gender in her concept of excessive sex distinction, which she defines as socially maintained differences between men and women that go beyond the differences dictated by biological reproduction. Between 1920 and 1960 feminist thinking and activism ebbed, partly due to a sense of anomie produced by its victory in getting the vote, partly in response to social crises—World War I and its aftermath, the Great Depression, World War II and its aftermath, and the Cold War of the 1950s. Women sociologists were left without a framework for critique of their professional marginalization. They worked as isolated individuals for a foothold in the male-dominated university. Even so these women sociologists did research on women’s lives and

worked to conceptualize gender within the prevailing framework of “sex roles” in work such as Helen Mayer Hacker’s “Women as a Minority Group” (1951) and Mirra Komarovsky’s “Cultural Contradictions of Sex Roles” (1946). Beginning in the 1960s, as a second wave of feminist activism energized feminist thinking, women in sociology drew strength to confront the organization of their profession and to (re-)establish a feminist perspective in the discipline (Feree, Khan, and Morimoto, 2007; Niebrugge, Lengermann, and Dickinson, 2010). Key to their success was the leadership of individual women like Alice Rossi, the establishment of the Women’s Caucus within the American Sociological Association and then in 1971 of a separate feminist organization, Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS), which in 1987 undertook the financially daring launch of a new journal, *Gender & Society*, under the editorship of Judith Lorber. These moves brought women a feminist base from which to speak to the profession and a feminist publication from which to introduce ideas to the discipline. The effects of Second Wave feminism continue to this day in sociology. Women have moved into the profession in unprecedented numbers, as students, teachers, and scholars; the majority of undergraduate majors and about half of Ph.D. recipients are now women (Stacey and Thorne, 1996). Women hold office in the discipline’s professional associations in percentages greater than their overall presence in the discipline (Rosenfeld, Cunningham, and Schmidt, 1997). Central to this Second Wave triumph has been establishing gender as a core concept in sociology. Gender, which is broadly understood as a social construction for classifying people and behaviors in terms of “man” and “woman,” “masculine” and “feminine,” is now an almost unavoidable variable in research studies—a variable whose presence implies a normative commitment to some standard of gender equality or the possibility that findings of inequality may be explained by practices of gender discrimination. The emphasis on gender vastly expanded the reach of feminist understandings to clearly include men as well as women, and the community of feminist scholars, though still primarily female, now includes important work by male feminists (Brickell, 2005; Connell, 1995; Diamond, 1992; Hearn, 2004; M. Hill, 1989; A. Johnson, 1997; Kimmel, 1996, 2002; Messner, 1997; Schwalbe, 1996; Trexler, 1995). Yet there remains a recurring unease about the relationship between feminism and sociology, an unease classically framed by Stacey and Thorne in their 1985 essay “The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology” and revisited subsequently (Alway, 1995b; Chafetz, 1997; Stacey and Thorne, 1996; Thistle, 2000; Wharton, 2006). A “feminist revolution in sociology” presumably would mean reworking sociology’s content, concepts, and practices to take account of the perspectives and experiences of women. This effort has been far from wholesale or systematic. For instance, within the sociological theory community, feminists constitute a distinct and active theory group, intermittently acknowledged but unassimilated, whose ideas have not yet radically affected the dominant conceptual frameworks of the discipline. The concern with gender has focused the energy of much feminist scholarship in sociology. But it may also have moved that energy away from two original primary concerns of feminist theory—the liberation of women and, as a means to that end, an articulation of the world in terms of women’s experience. The study of gender is certainly not antithetical to these projects but neither is it coterminous with them. This chapter attempts to take account of the enormous developments around the concept of gender while at the same time remembering that feminist theory is not the same thing as the sociology of gender, an awareness that may help explain recent developments in

feminist theorizing such as the growth of intersectionality theory and the resurgence of sexual difference theory, as well as the persistence of materialist or socialist feminism.

Lesson 23**Feminism as part of conflict perspective-II (Topic 87-90)****Topic 87-88: Varieties of feminist theories, Gender difference**

In this section we present a typology of contemporary feminist theories that guide feminist sociological theorizing. Our typology is organized around answers to feminism's most basic question. *And what about the women?* Essentially there have been five answers to that question. The first of these can be framed in terms of *gender difference* —women's location in, and experience of, most situations is *different* from that of the men in those situations. The second is that of *gender inequality* —women's location in most situations is not only different from but also less privileged than or *unequal* to that of men. The third is that of *gender oppression* — that is a direct power relationship between men and women through which women are restrained, subordinated, molded, used, and abused by men. The fourth is that women's experience of difference, inequality, and oppression varies according to their location within societies' arrangements of *structural oppression* —class, race, ethnicity, age, affectional preference, marital status, and global location. The fifth, a major focus in third wave feminism, questions the concept of woman so central to other theoretical positions, asking what implications flow from assuming the concept "woman" as a given in social analysis.

Within these basic categories we can distinguish among theories in terms of their differing answers to the second or explanatory question, "Why is all this as it is?" This typology provides one way to pattern the general body of contemporary feminist theory, created within and outside sociology. It also helps to pattern the expanding literature in the sociology of gender. The focus in the sociology of gender on the relationship of men and women is not equivalent to a feminist theory that presents a critical woman-centered patterning of human experience (Alsop, Fitzsimons, and Lennon, 2002; Chafetz, 2004), but some sociologists who begin from a sociology-of-gender standpoint have produced works of significance for feminist theory, and many sociologists are directly involved in producing feminist theory. This typology also needs to be read with the following cautions in mind: that it outlines theoretical positions, not the location of specific theorists, who over the course of a career may write from several of these positions, and that feminist theory and feminist sociological theory are dynamic enterprises that change over time. At the current moment, this typology is located within the following intellectual trends: (1) a steady movement toward synthesis, toward critically assessing how elements of these various theories may be combined; (2) a shift from women's oppression to oppressive practices and structures that affect both men and women; (3) tension between interpretations that emphasize culture and meaning and those that emphasize the material consequence of powers; (4) and finally, (5) the fact that feminist theory is coming to be practiced as part of what Thomas Kuhn has called "normal science," that is, its assumptions are taken for granted as a starting point for empirical research.

Overview of Varieties of Feminist Theory

Basic varieties of feminist theory—answers to the descriptive question “What about the women?”	Distinctions within theories—answers to the explanatory question, “Why is all this as it is?”
Gender difference	
Women’s location in, and experience of, most situations is different from that of men in the situation.	Cultural feminism Sexual difference theories Sociological theories • Institutional • Interactional
Gender inequality	
Women’s location in most situations is not only different from but also less privileged than or unequal to that of men.	Liberal feminism
Gender oppression	
Women’s experience of difference, inequality, and oppression varies by their social location within capitalism, patriarchy, and racism.	Psychoanalytic feminism Radical feminism
Structural oppression	
Women’s experience of difference, inequality, and oppression varies by their social location within capitalism, patriarchy, and racism.	Socialist feminism Intersectionality theory
Interrogating gender	
What is really to be understood by the category “woman”? How is it produced and maintained?	Postmodernist feminism

?

Gender Difference

Theories of gender difference are currently among the oldest of feminist theories experiencing a resurgence of interest and elaboration. Although historically the concept of “difference” has been at the center of several theoretical debates in feminism, we use it here to refer to theories that describe, explain, and trace the implications of the ways in which men and women are or are not the same in behavior and experience. All theories of gender difference have to confront the problem of what usually is termed “the essentialist argument”: the thesis that the fundamental differences between men and women are immutable. That immutability usually is seen as traceable to three factors: (1) biology, (2) social institutional needs for men and women to fill different roles, most especially but not exclusively in the family, and (3) the existential or phenomenological need of human beings to produce an “Other” as part of the act of self-definition.

There has been some interest in sociobiology by feminist scholars, most notably Alice Rossi (1977, 1983), who have explored the thesis that human biology determines many social differences between men and women. A continuation of this feminist interest in the interaction of biology and sociocultural processes is also to be found in recent statements on *new (or neo-) materialism* (Ahmed, 2008; Davis, 2009; Hird, 2004). But overall the feminist response to sociobiology has been oppositional (Chancer and Palmer, 2001; Risman, 2001). Theories of gender difference important in feminist theory today issue from a range of locations: the women’s movement, psychology, existential and phenomenological philosophy, sociology, and postmodernism.

Topic 89: Gender inequality

Four themes characterize feminist theorizing of gender inequality. Men and women are situated in society not only differently but also unequally. Women get less of the material resources, social status, power, and opportunities for self-actualization than do men who share their social location—be it a location based on class, race, occupation, ethnicity, religion, education, nationality, or any intersection of these factors. This inequality results from the organization of society, not from any significant biological or personality differences between women and men. For although individual human beings may vary somewhat from each other in their profile of potentials and traits, no significant pattern of natural variation distinguishes the sexes.

Instead, all human beings are characterized by a deep need for freedom to seek self-actualization and by a fundamental malleability that leads them to adapt to the constraints or opportunities of the situations in which they find themselves. To say that there is gender inequality, then, is to claim that women are situationally less empowered than men to realize the need they share with men for self-actualization. All inequality theories assume that both women and men will respond fairly easily and naturally to more egalitarian social structures and situations. They affirm, in other words, that it is possible to change the situation. In this belief, theorists of gender inequality contrast with the theorists of gender difference, who present a picture of social life in which gender differences are, whatever their cause, more durable, more penetrative of personality, and less easily changed.

Topic 90: Gender oppression

Theories of gender oppression describe women's situation as the consequence of a direct power relationship between men and women in which men have fundamental and concrete interests in controlling, using, and oppressing women—that is, in the practice of domination. By *domination*, oppression theorists mean any relationship in which one party (individual or collective), the *dominant*, succeeds in making the other party (individual or collective), the *subordinate*, an instrument of the dominant's will. Instrumentality, by definition, is understood as involving the denial of the subordinate's independent subjectivity (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1995). Women's situation, for theorists of gender oppression, is centrally that of being dominated and oppressed by men. This pattern of gender oppression is incorporated in the deepest and most pervasive ways into society's organization, a basic arrangement of domination most commonly called *patriarchy*, in which society is organized to privilege men in all aspects of social life. Patriarchy is not the unintended and secondary consequence of some other set of factors—be it biology or socialization or sex roles or the class system. It is a primary power arrangement sustained by strong and deliberate intention. Indeed, to theorists of gender oppression, gender differences and gender inequality are by-products of patriarchy.

Lesson 24**Feminism as part of conflict perspective-III (Topic 91-96)****Topic 91-92: Structural oppression (socialist feminism)****Structural Oppression**

Structural oppression theories, like gender oppression theories, recognize that oppression results from the fact that some groups of people derive direct benefits from controlling, using, and subjugating other groups of people. Structural oppression theorists analyze how interests in domination are enacted through social structure, here understood as those recurring and routinized large-scale arrangements of social relations that arise out of history, and are always arrangements of power. These theorists focus on the structures of patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and heterosexism, and they locate enactments of domination and experiences of oppression in the interplay of these structures, that is, in the way they mutually reinforce each other. Structural oppression theorists do not absolve or deny the agency of individual dominants, but they examine how that agency is the product of structural arrangements. In this section we look at two types of structural oppression theory: socialist feminism and intersectionality theory.

Socialist Feminism

The theoretical project of socialist feminism develops around three goals: (1) to achieve a critique of the distinctive yet interrelated oppressions of patriarchy and capitalism from a standpoint in women's experience, (2) to develop explicit and adequate methods for social analysis out of an expanded understanding of historical materialism, and (3) to incorporate an understanding of the significance of ideas into a materialist analysis of the determination of human affairs. Socialist feminists have set themselves the formal project of achieving both a synthesis of and a theoretical step beyond other feminist theories, most specifically Marxian and radical feminist thought.

Radical feminism, as discussed above, is a critique of patriarchy. Marxian feminism, described here, has traditionally brought together Marxian class analysis and feminist social protest. But this amalgam—portrayed as an uneasy marriage often produced not an intensified theory of gender oppression but a more muted statement of gender inequality as women's concerns were grafted onto, rather than made equal partners in, the critique of class oppression. While pure Marxian feminism is a relatively dormant theory in contemporary American feminism, it remains important as an influence on socialist feminism. Its foundation was laid by Marx and Engels. Their major concern was social class oppression, but they occasionally turned their attention to gender oppression, most famously in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (written by Engels in 1884 from extensive notes made by Marx in the year immediately preceding his death in 1883). We briefly summarize this book because it gives a good introduction to the classic Marxian theory of gender oppression and to the method of historical materialism.

The major argument of *The Origins* is that woman's subordination results not from her biology, which is presumably immutable, but from social relations that have a clear and traceable history and that presumably can be changed. In the context of nineteenth-century thinking about gender, this was a radical, indeed a feminist, argument. The relational basis for women's subordination

lies in the family, an institution aptly named from the Latin word for *servant*, because the family as it exists in complex societies is overwhelmingly a system in which men command women's services.

Although the ideology of contemporary societies treats family as a fundamental and universal feature of social life, Engels and Marx use archaeological and anthropological evidence to show that the family is a fairly recent relational invention, that for much of prehistory men and women lived in kin structures in which women enjoyed relative autonomy primarily because they had an independent economic base as gatherers, crafters, storers, and distributors of essential materials.

The factor that destroyed this type of social system, producing what Engels calls “the world historic defeat of the female sex” (Engels, 1884/1970:87), was an economic one, specifically the replacement of hunting and gathering by herding and farming economies in which men's resources of strength, mobility, and a technology derived from their earlier hunting roles gave them a systematic advantage over women. This period saw the invention of the concept of *property*, the idea and reality of a male class claiming as its own the communal resources for economic production. In these new economies, men as property owners needed both a compliant labor force—be it of slaves, captives, womenwives, children—and heirs who would serve as a means of preserving and passing on property. Thus emerged the first *familia*, a master and his slave-servants, wife-servants, children-servants. Since then, the exploitation of labor has developed into increasingly complex structures of domination, most particularly class relations, and the family has evolved along with historical transformations of economic and property systems into an embedded and dependent institution, reflecting all the injustices of the economy and consistently enforcing the subordination of women. Engels and Marx conclude that only with the destruction of property rights through class revolution will women attain freedom of social, political, economic, and personal action.

Locating the origin of patriarchy in the emergence of property relations subsumes women's oppression under the general framework of Marxian class analysis. “Property”—understood not as personal possessions but as ownership of the resources necessary for social production (the means of production)—is the basis of class division because it creates a situation in which some groups are able to claim that they own the means of production while other groups work to do the producing. Marxian analysis focuses particularly on how this class division works out under capitalism, the economic system of modern societies. The distinctive feature of capitalism is that the class that owns the means of production—the capitalists—operates on a logic of continuous capital accumulation; *capital* is wealth (money and other assets), which can be used to generate the material infrastructure of economic production. Unlike other forms of economic organization in which people may seek to exchange either goods or money for more goods, capitalists seek to exchange goods in order to amass wealth. The mechanism by which capitalists turn goods into wealth is surplus value; surplus value is the difference between the compensation given to workers for their production and the value of the goods they produce; this surplus value is appropriated by the capitalist, who uses it to enhance his own lifestyle and power and, above all, to reinvest in the ongoing process of capital accumulation and expansion.

Socialist feminists accept the Marxian analysis of capitalism's class relations as an explication of one major structure of oppression. But they reject the Marxian analysis of patriarchy as a by-product of the same economic production. Instead they endorse the radical feminist argument that

patriarchy, while interacting with economic conditions, is an independent structure of oppression. Socialist feminism sets out to bring together these dual knowledges—knowledge of oppression under capitalism and of oppression under patriarchy—into a unified explanation of all forms of social oppression. One term used to try to unify these two oppressions is *capitalist patriarchy*. But the term perhaps more widely used is *domination*, defined above (under “Gender Oppression”) as a relationship in which one party, *the dominant*, succeeds in making the other party, *the subordinate*, an instrument of the dominant’s will, refusing to recognize the subordinate’s independent subjectivity. Socialist feminism’s explanations of oppression present domination as a large-scale structural arrangement, a power relation between categories of social actors that is reproduced

by the willful and intentional actions of individual actors. Women are central to socialist feminism as the primary topic for analysis, and as the essential vantage point on domination in all its forms. But these theorists are concerned with all experiences of oppression, both by women and by men. They also explore how some women, themselves oppressed, actively participate in the oppression of other women, for example, privileged-class women in American society who oppress poor women.

Socialist feminists use historical materialism as their analytical method. *Historical materialism*, a basic principle in Marxian social theory, is the claim that the material conditions of human life, including the activities and relationships that produce those conditions, are the key factors that pattern human experience, personality, ideas, and social arrangements; that those conditions change over time because of dynamics immanent within them; and that history is a record of the changes in the material conditions of a group’s life and of the correlative changes in experiences, personality, ideas, and social arrangements. Historical materialists hold that any effort at social analysis must trace in historically concrete detail the specifics of a group’s material conditions and the links between those conditions and the experiences, personalities, events, ideas, and social arrangements characteristic of the group. In linking historical materialism to their focus on domination, socialist feminists attempt to realize their goal of a theory that probes the broadest of human social arrangements, domination, yet remains firmly committed to precise, historically concrete analyses of the material and social arrangements that frame particular situations of domination.

Within this general theoretical framing, socialist feminist analyses have distinct emphases. First, *materialist feminism* situates gender relations within the structure of the contemporary capitalist system, particularly as that system is now operating globally. The interest of materialist feminists is in the implications of global capitalism for women’s lives and in the ways in which women’s labor contributes to the expanding wealth of capitalism. Within global capitalism, women as wage earners are more poorly paid than men because patriarchal ideology assigns them a lower social status. Because patriarchy assigns them the responsibility for the home, they are structurally more precariously positioned in wage-sector employment than men are and thus are more difficult to organize. These two factors make them an easy source of profit for the capitalist class. Further, capitalism depends on the unpaid production of women whose work as housewives, wives, and mothers subsidizes and disguises the real costs of reproducing and maintaining the workforce. And women’s work as consumers of goods and services for the household becomes a major source of capitalist profit making.

A second emphasis given most form by Dorothy Smith and her students, is on the *relations of ruling*, the processes by which capitalist patriarchal domination is enacted through an interdependent system of control that includes not only the economy but the state and the privileged professions (including social science). The dynamics of this arrangement of control are explored through a focus on women's daily activities and experiences in the routine maintenance of daily life. The relations of ruling are revealed as pervading and controlling women's daily production via "texts," extralocal, generalized requirements that seek to pattern and appropriate their labor—texts like health insurance forms, the school calendar, advertisements about the ideal home and the ideal female body.

Socialist feminists' program for change calls for global solidarity among women to combat the abuses capitalism works in their lives, in the lives of their communities, and in the environment. Indeed, eco-feminism is a major current trend in socialist feminism. They call on the feminist community to be ever vigilant about the dangers of their own co-optation into a privileged intelligentsia that serves capitalist interests. Their project is to mobilize people to use the state as a means for the effective redistribution of societal resources through the provision of an extensive safety net of public services such as publicly supported education, health care, transportation, child care, and housing; a progressive tax structure that reduces the wide disparities of income between rich and poor; and the guarantee of a living wage to all members of the community. They believe that this mobilization will be effective only if people become aware of and caring about the life conditions of others as well as their own. The feminist social scientist's duty is to make visible the material inequalities that shape people's lives.

Topic 93-94: Structural oppression (Intersectionality)

The central issue for intersectionality theory is the understanding that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. The explanation for that variation is that while all women potentially experience oppression on the basis of gender, women are, nevertheless, differentially oppressed by the varied intersections of other arrangements of social inequality. These *vectors of oppression and privilege* (or, in Patricia Hill Collins's phrase, "the matrix of domination" [1990]) include not only gender but also class, race, global location, sexual preference, and age. The variation of these intersections qualitatively alters the experience of being a woman—and this alteration, this diversity, must be taken into account in theorizing the experiences of "women." The argument in intersectionality theory is that it is intersection itself that produces a particular experience of oppression, and one cannot arrive at an adequate explanation by using an additive strategy of gender, plus race, plus class, plus sexuality (Andersen, 2005). Crenshaw (1989), for example, shows that black women frequently experience discrimination in employment because they are *black women*, but courts routinely refuse to recognize this discrimination—unless it can be shown to be a case of what is considered general discrimination, "sex discrimination" (read "also white women"), or "race discrimination" (read "also black men"). In characterizing these as vectors of oppression *and* privilege, we wish to suggest a fundamental insight of intersectionality theories—that the privilege exercised by some women and men turns on the oppression of other women and men. Theories of intersectionality at their core understand these arrangements of inequality as hierarchical structures based in unjust power relations. The theme of injustice signals the consistent critical focus of this analysis.

Intersectionality theory recognizes the fundamental link between ideology and power that allows dominants to control subordinates by creating a politics in which difference becomes a conceptual tool for justifying arrangements of oppression. In social practice, dominants use differences among people to justify oppressive practices by translating difference into models of inferiority/superiority; people are socialized to relate to difference not as a source of diversity, interest, and cultural wealth but evaluatively in terms of “better” or “worse.” As Lorde 1984:115) argues, this “institutional rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people.” These ideologies operate in part by creating “*a mythical norm*” against which people evaluate others and themselves; in United States society this norm is “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure” (Lorde, 1984:116). This norm not only allows dominants to control social production (both paid and unpaid), but also becomes part of individual subjectivity—an internalized rejection of difference that can operate to make people devalue themselves, reject people from different groups, and create criteria within their own group for excluding, punishing, or marginalizing group members. Anzaldúa describes this last practice as “Othering,” an act of definition done within a subordinated group to establish that a group member is unacceptable, an “other,” by some criterion; this definitional activity, she points out, erodes the potential for coalition and resistance.

The intersection of vectors of oppression and privilege creates variations in both the forms and the intensity of people’s experience of oppression. Much of the writing and research done out of an intersectionality perspective presents the concrete reality of people’s lives as those lives are shaped by the intersections of these vectors. The most-studied intersections by feminists are of gender and race, gender and class and race, gender, and class. Other analyses include gender and age, gender and global location, and gender and sexual preference. In the most recent writings out of this perspective, intersectionality theory has also been applied to the circumstances of subordinate men. In response to their material circumstances, people create interpretations and strategies for surviving and resisting the persistent exercise of unjust power. One part of the project of intersectionality theory is to give voice to the group knowledges worked out in specific life experiences created by historical intersections of inequality and to develop various feminist expressions of these knowledges—for example, black feminist thought or chicana feminism.

Intersectionality theory develops a critique of work done in Second Wave (and First Wave) feminism as work reflecting the experience and concerns of white privileged-class feminists in North Atlantic societies. Some of this work of critique is paralleled by work done in postmodernism—but this parallelism should not be overstated. Intersectionality theory is one of the oldest traditions in feminism, at least in the United States, going back, for example, to Sojourner Truth’s “Aint I a Woman” speech at the Akron Women’s Rights Convention of 1852 (Zerai, 2000).

This critique has produced questions about what we mean by categories such as “woman,” “gender,” “race,” and “sisterhood”—questions that are essentially political in intent, and not, as in post modernism, philosophical. It has focused on the diversity of experience in such seeming universals as “mothering” and “family” and has reinterpreted theoretical works like the sociological-psychoanalytic studies of Chodorow and Benjamin. This critique has prompted a repositioning of the understandings of “whiteness” by white feminists who seek to understand

whiteness as a construction, the ways whiteness results in privilege, what they can actively do to reduce racism, and how they can contribute to producing a more inclusive feminist analysis. Two central concerns have developed in recent intersectionality theory. The first is how to allow for the analytical principle and empirical fact of diversity among women while at the same time holding to the valuational and political position that women share a distinctive standpoint. Explaining *standpoint*, Collins (1998:224–225) proposes that it is the view of the world shared by a group characterized by a “heterogeneous commonality”; “shared,” Collins argues, refers, as Marx suggests, to “ ‘circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.’ ” Thus, Collins concludes that a group’s standpoint is constituted not out of some essentialism but out of a recognition that women have common experiences and interests. While vectors of oppression and privilege—race, class, gender, age, global location, sexual preference—intersect in all people’s lives, these theorists argue that the way they intersect markedly affects the degree to which a common standpoint is affirmed. The second pressing concern is how to conceptualize and empirically observe the interplay of multiple vectors of oppression and/or privilege in people’s experiences and actions, so that one is not, for example, talking first about the effects of gender, then of race, then of class (Weber, 2000). How do these factors coexist? In balance? In hierarchy? In shifting schema of ascendancy? What are the implications of this issue for methods of—studying intersectionality? But, importantly intersectionality theorists warn that while it is easy to locate the experience of intersection and of standpoint in individuals, this reductionism is theoretically and politically dangerous, erasing the historical structures of unequal power that have produced the individual experience and obscuring the need for political change.

In developing an agenda for change, intersectionality theory turns to the knowledge of oppressed people and their long-held evaluative principles of faith and justice. The theory argues for the need to bear witness, to protest, and to organize for change within the context of the oppressed community, for only within community can one keep faith in the eventual triumph of justice—a justice understood not in the narrow framing of legal rationality but as the working-out within social institutions and social relations of the principles of fairness to and concern for others and oneself.

Topic 95: Feminism and post modernism

Postmodernist theory has affected feminist theory in general in two important ways. First, it has radically challenged the central question of all feminist theory, “*And what about the women?*” by developing a philosophic argument about what the category “women” really means, an argument that extends to challenge the concept of gender. Second, postmodernism has provided feminist theory with “an oppositional epistemology,” a strategy for questioning the claims to truth advanced by any given theory. It has done the latter most effectively through its creation of a rich and provocative language to be used in challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions that it argues **were constituted by modernity. The most important thinker in a feminist postmodern theory is philosopher Judith Butler; she and other feminist postmodernists draw on the work of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, among other poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers.**

Postmodernist theory begins with the observation that people no longer live under conditions of modernity but live now in “postmodernity.” This postmodern world is produced by the interplay of four major changes: (1) an expansive stage in global capitalism; (2) the weakening of centralized

state power (with the collapse of the old imperial systems, the fragmentation of the communist bloc, and the rise of ethnic politics within nation-states); (3) the patterning of life by an increasingly powerful and penetrative technology that controls production and promotes consumerism; and (4) the development of liberationist social movements based not in class but in other forms of identity—nationalism, race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, and environmentalism. These changes, as feminist philosopher Susan Bordo explains, were brought about by people worldwide engaged in political practice and asking a new set of questions: “*Whose truth? Whose nature? Whose version of reason? Whose history? Whose tradition?*”

These questions led postmodernists to reject the basic principle of modernist epistemology—that humans can, by the exercise of pure reason, arrive at a complete and objective knowledge of the world, a knowledge that is a representation of reality, “a mirror of nature.” They argue that this modernist principle gives rise to a number of epistemological errors—the *god-eye* view that locates the observer outside the world being observed; the *grand narrative* that holistically explains that world; *foundationalism* that identifies certain rules of analysis as always appropriate; *universalism* that asserts that there are discoverable principles that everywhere govern the world; *essentialism* that claims that people are constituted by core and unchanging qualities; *representation* that presumes that one’s statement about the world can accurately reflect the world. Postmodernism questions the existence both of “reason” as a universal, essential quality of the human mind and of the “reasoning subject” as a consistent, unified configuration of consciousness. Postmodernists portray the knowledgemaking process as one of multiple representations of experience created by differently located discourse groups in which the establishment of any hegemonic knowledge-claim results from an effective exercise of power. They have produced a powerful set of practices and vocabulary for *interrogating* the modernist claim of definitive statements. They suggest alternative epistemological practices such as *decentering*, which moves the understandings of nonprivileged groups to the center of discourse and knowledge; *deconstruction*, which shows how concepts, posed as accurate representations of the world, are historically constructed and contain contradictions; and a focus on *difference*, which explores any knowledge construct not only for what it says but for what it erases or marginalizes, particularly through the application of modernist *binary logic* of “either/or.”

A major substantive contribution of postmodernist theory to general feminist theory has been its questioning of the primary category of feminist theory: woman (or women). The classic statement of this questioning has been Judith Butler’s 1990 *Gender Trouble*. Butler questioned *woman*, *gender*, and whether there is, as popularly presumed, a coherent relation among *sex*, *gender*, and *sexuality*—and she situated her argument directly in the political context of the women’s movement, warning that “The premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes. Indeed, the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from ‘women’ whom feminism claims to represent suggest the necessary limits of identity politics” (Butler, 1990:4); this warning helped focus a range of Third Wave feminist concerns with the Second Wave position that was seemingly anchored in the concept of woman as a possible if not a seamless category.

For Butler, the category of woman arises out of the process that produces gender, a process she names “performativity.” Her definition of *performativity*, a work-in-progress, has its origins in speech-act theory, where a performative is “that discursive practice that brings into being or enacts that which it names and so marks the constitutive or productive power of discourse” (Butler, 1995:134). (A classic example of a performative, drawn from speech-act philosopher J. L. Austin, occurs when a judge or minister says, “I now pronounce you man and wife.”) Butler sees gender arising as people perform it in interaction with each other—by performing gender, they create it. Butler later elaborates how this occurs in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) using Jacques Derrida’s principle of *iterability* to explain how these repeated performances lead to a sense of gender and woman and man. Iterability is the capacity of signs or symbols to be repeated in different situations—for example, “I love you,” “You’re looking great,” “You wanna go out?” This repetition both confers consistency to performance and allows for some possibility of variation in the meaning and outcome. But people are not free to choose their performances.

Drawing on Foucault, Butler sets performativity in the context of discourse or “regulative discourse.” For Foucault, a discourse is a composite of ideas, actions, beliefs, and attitudes that systematically relate and construct the worlds and the subjects about which they speak. Gender performance then is subject to regulative discourses that vary across history and culture but that control what one is able to do to act as a man or a woman. Because of performativity, subject to iterability and regulative discourse, gender is experienced as a core identity that everyone shares. The assignment of sex to an individual, in terms of two binary opposites, is a performance, subject to regulative discourse that specifies what can be taken into account in making this assignment and reproduced through iterability. But an alternative understanding Butler says is that “In the place of an original identification which serves as a determining cause, gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction” (Butler, 1990:138). In Butler’s thinking, people do not begin life with an internal identity as man or woman; rather they get hold of certain understandings of man and woman depending on their personal biographies and their location in history, and the regulatory discourses that constitute them. These meanings suggest ways of acting, and as the person looks around, she or he can see other people engaged in similar ways of acting. Thus, gender is created as people imitate other people trying to act in accord with culturally given ideas about masculinity and femininity. These ideas so effectively bring into being what they name that people take as real the idea of a core gendered self. But Butler (1990:25) argues, playing off Nietzsche, that “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.” Key to those expressions in a society governed by a sociocultural history that privileges heterosexuality as natural is the need to establish oneself as different from the other gender in order to participate in the ongoing imitation that is heterosexuality.

Butler’s work constitutes the major contribution of postmodern feminism, but other scholars have adapted ideas from Michel Foucault to the project of women’s liberation, most especially his insights about power, power/knowledge, and body. Illustrative of feminist adaptations are studies by Bartsky (1992) and Bordo (1993) that turn on Foucault’s insights into the body as the principal site for the exercise of power in modern societies, his ability to present a nonessentialist but very material body that is historically constructed by discourses at a given moment in time. Bartsky

looks at women's "self-imposed" exercise and dieting regimes and Bordo at women's eating disorders, both of which are seen as examples of bodies being created out of regulative discourses or power/knowledge regimes that say this is what can be done at this moment in the production of femininity. But the feminist relation to postmodernism is also marked by unease.

Many feminists see postmodernism as exclusive in aspiration and therefore antithetical to the feminist project of inclusion (Benhabib, 1998). Evidence for this unease includes postmodernism's arcane vocabulary, its location in the academy rather than in political struggle, and its nonreflexive grasp for hegemonic status in that academic discourse. Many feminists also question the "innocence" of the postmodernist challenge, wondering whether it is truly liberationist or is part of a politics of knowledge in which a privileged academic class responds to the challenges of marginalized persons with a technically complex argument to the effect that no location for speech can claim authority. Hartsock (1990:169) has made the classic statement of this concern: "Somehow it seems highly suspicious that it is at the precise moment when so many groups have been engaged in . . . redefinitions of the marginalized Others that suspicions emerge about the nature of the 'subject,' about the possibilities for a general theory which can describe the world, about historical 'progress.' " Another source of unease is that the postmodernist emphasis on an infinite regress of deconstruction and difference leads people away from collective, liberationist politics and toward a radical individualism that may conclude that " 'because every . . . one of us is different and special, it follows that every problem or crisis is exclusively our own, or, conversely, your problem—not mine' " (Jordan, 1992; P. Collins, 1998:150). Above all, the postmodernist turn takes feminist scholars away from the materiality of inequality, injustice, and oppression and toward a neo-idealist posture that sees the world as "discourse," "representation," and "text." In severing the link to material inequality, postmodernism may be moving feminism away from its commitment to progressive change—the foundational project of any critical social theory.

Topic 96: Concluding remarks

- Feminism has a history as long as women's subordination.
- Women have been subordinated almost always and everywhere.
- Feminist theory develops a system of ideas about human life that features women as:
 - ❖ objects and subjects,
 - ❖ doers and knowers.
- Feminist theory has typically expanded and contracted with societal swings.
- The contemporary stage of feminists shows a self-sustaining expansion despite new conservative societal trends.
- Feminists guided by four basic questions:
 - ❖ And what about the
 - ❖ women?
 - ❖ Why is women's situation as it is?
 - ❖ How can we change and improve the social world? and
 - ❖ What about differences among women?
- Answers produce the varieties of feminist theory.
- Feminist theory offers five key propositions as a basis for the revision of standard sociological theories:

1. The practice of sociological theory must be based in a sociology of knowledge that recognizes the partiality of all knowledge.
 - ❖ The knower is embodied and socially located.
 - ❖ The function of power in effecting what becomes knowledge.
2. Macro social structures are based in processes controlled by dominants.
 - ❖ Subordinates' work is made largely invisible and undervalued even to themselves by dominant ideology.
 - ❖ Dominants appropriate productive work of society, including not only economic production but also women's work of social reproduction.
3. Micro-interactional processes in society are enactments of these dominant-subordinate power arrangements, enactments very differently interpreted by powerful actors and subordinate actors.
4. These conditions create in women's subjectivity a bifurcated consciousness along the line of fault caused by the juxtaposition of patriarchal ideology and women's experience of the actualities of their lives.
5. What has been said for women may be applicable to all subordinate peoples in some parallel, though not identical, form.
 - ❖ Questions to be looked at:
 - ❖ How do these factors coexist?
 - ❖ In balance?
 - ❖ In hierarchy?
 - ❖ In shifting schema of ascendance?
 - ❖ What are the implications of this issue for methods of—studying intersectionality?

Lesson 25**Social Exchange (Topic 97-98)**

In everyday life we clearly understand the contrast between market transactions at the shopping mall or an automobile dealership and our personal relationships with family members, friends, and lovers. In market transactions our goal is to get the best deal for ourselves, without being obligated to show concern for the personal welfare of the person with whom we happen to be doing business. In contrast, our relationships with family members, friends, and lovers reflect our emotional attachments to one another. This means we are expected to consider their wishes and needs as well as our own, and we are confident they would do the same for us.

But personal relationships, like market transactions, can also be viewed in terms of costs and rewards. Being involved in family relationships or spending time with close friends or lovers is intrinsically rewarding. But there are certain costs to consider as well, even though they may not always be experienced as costs. At the very least, there are the costs of time, energy, and alternative activities that may be foregone, plus the obligation to provide help to our family and friends when they need it. Even though friends and family members may feel it is not appropriate to “keep score,” their mutual sharing and caring is probably expected to be balanced over time. If costs and rewards should seem to either party to be unevenly distributed, this may lead to feelings of resentment or conflict that may eventually undermine the relationship.

The perspective of exchange and rational choice theory involves looking at all social relations—friendships and other personal relations as well as onetime market transactions and long-term formal contracts—in terms of costs and rewards, both material and nonmaterial. As with symbolic interaction theory, analysis begins at the micro level. However, micro-level exchanges may be seen as the foundation for meso and macro level structures. Regardless of the level, social exchanges of all types reflect individuals’ efforts to meet their own personal needs and interests through the choices they make, including material as well as nonmaterial social and emotional needs. Even when their actions are consciously oriented toward the wishes or welfare of others, the focus in both social exchange and rational choice theory is on the benefits received in return. As contemporary rational choice theory has been elaborated from the earlier ideas of exchange theory, the individualistic assumptions of these perspectives have been expanded to incorporate the notion that individuals’ personal interests may be modified through their participation in a network of social relations and organizational involvements. But even though their interests are shaped by this social environment, rational choice theory in American sociology seems to emphasize individual interests more than shared values or normative commitments or widespread concerns for the common good. In the following section, this highly individualistic model will be contrasted briefly with a more collectivist version of exchange theory that was implicit in some of the earlier, classical stage theories.

Long before the development of the current exchange and rational choice theory perspectives, the social exchange process had been analyzed by earlier theorists from within an individualistic, utilitarian (or rational choice) perspective. For example, the classical British economist Adam Smith emphasized the benefits of market exchanges in promoting the overall welfare of society. As noted earlier, the policy implication of this view is that government regulation of the market system should be minimal. Smith also recognized that people’s basic selfishness could be

restrained somewhat by shared moral sentiments, although individual interests were given priority in his analysis. According to the closely related utilitarian perspective, a basic law of human nature is that people always seek to avoid pain (or reduce costs) and maximize pleasure (or other rewards). This image of human nature is reflected in the view that the overall organization of society itself is based on a contractual agreement that was negotiated in the beginning to accomplish goals that could not be achieved satisfactorily through individual effort or independent market transactions.

This individualistic emphasis can be contrasted with a more “collectivist” version of exchange theory. Although Durkheim is not generally considered an exchange theorist, a significant expansion of exchange networks in modern society is certainly implied in his analysis of the increased interdependence that results from the elaboration of the division of labor. In his view, the increased individualism that results from this process is a reflection of the greater social heterogeneity resulting from occupational specialization and a more complex division of labor. However, people’s growing dependence on one another for meeting their various needs promotes a greater level of “organic solidarity” that is based on exchange transactions and that partially replaces the “mechanical solidarity” of simpler and more segmented societies with less interdependence.

The individualistic and collectivist versions were contrasted in Peter Ekeh’s (1975) analysis of the “two traditions” in exchange theory. Ekeh drew on French anthropologist Levi-Strauss’s analysis of the custom whereby marriages were arranged through exchange transactions among different clans in primitive societies. Working in the tradition established by Durkheim, Levi-Strauss attempted to show how the exchange of marriage partners contributed to social cohesion among the clans involved. His theoretical argument distinguished between **restricted** versus **generalized** exchanges. The restricted pattern involved direct exchanges. In generalized exchange, in contrast, members of a triad or larger group receive benefits from a partner other than the one to whom they give benefits. Thus the interchange does not involve direct mutual reciprocity. The restricted exchange involves the pattern $A \leftrightarrow B, C \leftrightarrow D, \dots, n \leftrightarrow n$, while the generalized exchange is based on the pattern $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow A \dots \rightarrow n \rightarrow A$. In Ekeh’s argument the restricted pattern will reflect a concern with balance or equity. Exchange partners may be involved personally with one another, but each transaction is relatively self-sufficient, and there is no overall integration of these limited transactions within a larger network of relationships. Such exchange patterns would seem consistent with a structure of relatively self-sufficient families, tribes, or local communities. Within these relatively self-contained social circles, social exchanges would be extensive, but exchanges between different social circles would be minimal.

Generalized exchange, in contrast, involves a larger network of transactions, many of which are indirect. There is less emphasis on personal negotiation of exchange terms. Instead, individuals are oriented more toward the overall system and the rewards received from participation in it. In such a system, each party is expected to make contributions that benefit others without expecting **an immediate benefit in return. This means that members must have a relatively high level of trust** that others will discharge their obligations, even without receiving immediate benefits in return. All members benefit, but without individual negotiation or immediate payment. Ekeh suggests that the generalized pattern should be associated with a higher level of moral development than the restricted pattern. Members are expected to fulfill their obligations without concern for their own interests (in the short run), and to trust that others will do likewise. The underlying image of this

generalized pattern differs from the individualistic implications of market transactions as highlighted in classical economic thought and British utilitarianism. Moreover, the form of the exchange is not a matter for individuals to decide on their own. Instead, exchange patterns are institutionalized and legitimated by a moral code that transcends individuals' utilitarian interests. This pattern contrasts with economic market exchanges which individuals negotiate on their own, and which are expected to be governed by self-interests.

To illustrate how the debate regarding these contrasting perspectives has continued, George Homans' early exchange theory was developed in opposition to the collectivist orientation of Levi-Strauss's analysis of marriage and kinship patterns (Homans and Schneider, 1955). In contrast to Levi-Strauss's focus on the functional need of society for social solidarity, Homans insisted that these practices should be understood in terms of already-existing emotional attachments between the families involved. The individualistic pattern is also reflected in John Thibaut and Harold Kelley's (1959) analysis of the particular configuration of social relations that develop in group settings. In their model, these relations can be explained in terms of individuals' calculations of anticipated costs and rewards. They argued that individuals will focus on one-on-one relations if they anticipate greater rewards than could be obtained by including additional parties. On the other hand, if they see an opportunity to increase their total rewards (minus whatever costs may be involved) by expanding the scope of interaction to include others, they will attempt to do so. Of course, their success will be contingent on the expectations of these other parties that their rewards will also be greater than with alternative patterns in which they may become involved. Such patterns can readily be observed in the mingling of participants in unstructured social gatherings.

Lesson 26**Social Exchange: George C. Homans (Topic 99-103)****Topic 99: George C. Homans Elementary exchange****Introduction**

The heart of George Homans's exchange theory lies in a set of fundamental propositions. Although some of his propositions deal with at least two interacting individuals, Homans was careful to point out that these propositions are based on psychological principles. According to Homans, they are psychological for two reasons. First, "they are usually stated and empirically tested by persons who call themselves psychologists" (Homans, 1967:39–40). Second, and more important, they are psychological because of the level at which they deal with the individual in society: "They are propositions about the behavior of individual human beings, rather than propositions about groups or societies as such; and *the behavior of men, as men*, is generally considered the province of psychology" (Homans, 1967:40; italics added). As a result of this position, Homans admitted to being "what has been called—and it is a horrid phrase—a psychological reductionist" (1974:12). Reductionism to Homans is "the process of showing how the propositions of one named science [in this case, sociology] follow in logic from the more general propositions of another named science [in this case, psychology]" (1984:338).

Although Homans made the case for psychological principles, he did not think of individuals as isolated. He recognized that people are social and spend a considerable portion of their time interacting with other people. He attempted to explain social behavior with psychological principles: "What the position [Homans's] does assume is that the general propositions of psychology, which are propositions about the effects on human behavior of the results thereof, do not change when the results come from other men rather than from the physical environment" (Homans, 1967:59). Homans did not deny the Durkheimian position that something new emerges from interaction. Instead, he argued that those emergent properties can be explained by psychological principles; there is no need for new sociological propositions to explain social facts. He used the basic sociological concept of a norm as illustration:

The great example of a social fact is a social norm, and the norms of the groups to which they belong certainly constrain towards conformity the behavior of many more individuals. The question is not that of the existence of constraint, but of its explanation. . . . The norm does not constrain automatically: individuals conform, when they do so, because they perceive it is to their net advantage to conform, and it is psychology that deals with the effect on behavior of perceived advantage. (Homans, 1967:60)

Homans detailed a program to "bring men back in[to]" sociology, but he also tried to develop a theory that focuses on psychology, people, and the "elementary forms of social life." According to Homans, this theory "envisages social *behavior* as an exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons" (1961:13; italics added). For example, Homans sought to explain the development of power-driven machinery in the textile industry, and thereby the Industrial Revolution, through the psychological principle that people are likely to act in such a way as to increase their rewards. More generally, in his version

of exchange theory, he sought to explain elementary social behavior in terms of rewards and costs. He was motivated in part by the structural-functional theories of his acknowledged “colleague and friend” Talcott Parsons. He argued that such theories “possess every virtue except that of explaining anything” (Homans, 1961:10). To Homans, the structural functionalists did little more than create conceptual categories and schemes. Homans admitted that a scientific sociology needs such categories, but sociology “also needs a set of general propositions about the relations among the categories, for without such propositions explanation is impossible. No explanation without propositions!” (1974:10). Homans, therefore, set for himself the task of developing those propositions that focus on the psychological level; these form the groundwork of exchange theory. In *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms* (1961, 1974), Homans acknowledged that his exchange theory is derived from both behavioral psychology and elementary economics (rational choice theory). In fact, Homans (1984) regrets that his theory was labeled “exchange theory” because he sees it as a behavioral psychology applied to specific situations. Homans began with a discussion of the exemplar of the behaviorist paradigm, B. F. Skinner, in particular of Skinner’s study of pigeons: Suppose, then, that a fresh or naïve pigeon is in its cage in the laboratory. One of the items in its inborn repertory of behavior which it uses to explore its environment is the peck. As the pigeon wanders around the cage pecking away, it happens to hit a round red target, at which point the waiting psychologists or, it may be, an automatic machine feeds it grain. The evidence is that the probability of the pigeon’s emitting the behavior again—the probability, that is, of its not just pecking but pecking on the target—has increased. In Skinner’s language the pigeon’s behavior in pecking the target is an *operant*; the operant has been *reinforced*; grain is the *reinforcer*; and the pigeon has undergone *operant conditioning*. Should we prefer our language to be ordinary English, we may say that the pigeon has learned to peck the target by being rewarded for doing so.

Skinner was interested in this instance in pigeons; Homans’s concern was humans. According to Homans, Skinner’s pigeons are not engaged in a true exchange relationship with the psychologist. The pigeon is engaged in a one-sided exchange relationship, whereas human exchanges are at least two-sided. The pigeon is being reinforced by the grain, but the psychologist is not truly being reinforced by the pecks of the pigeon. The pigeon is carrying on the same sort of relationship with the psychologist that it would have with the physical environment. Because there is no reciprocity, Homans defined this as *individual behavior*. Homans seemed to relegate the study of this sort of behavior to the psychologist, whereas he urged the sociologist to study social behavior “where the activity of each of at least two animals reinforces (or punishes) the activity of the other, and where accordingly each influences the other” (1961:30). However, it is significant that, according to Homans, *no new propositions* are needed to explain social behavior as opposed to individual behavior. The laws of individual behavior as developed by Skinner in his study of pigeons explain social behavior as long as we take into account the complications of mutual reinforcement. Homans admitted that he might ultimately have to go beyond the principles derived by Skinner, but only reluctantly. In his theoretical work, Homans restricted himself to everyday social interaction.

Topic 100-103: Exchange Propositions

Focusing on this sort of situation, and basing his ideas on Skinner’s findings, Homans developed several propositions.

The Success Proposition

For all actions taken by persons, the more often a particular action of a person is rewarded, the more likely the person is to perform that action. (Homans, 1974:16)

In terms of Homans's Person-Other example in an office situation, this proposition means that a person is more likely to ask others for advice if he or she has been rewarded in the past with useful advice. Furthermore, the more often a person received useful advice in the past, the more often he or she will request more advice. Similarly, the other person will be more willing to give advice and give it more frequently if he or she often has been rewarded with approval in the past. Generally, behavior in accord with the success proposition involves three stages: first, a person's action; next, a rewarded result; and finally, a repetition of the original action or at minimum one similar in at least some respects. Homans specified a number of things about the success proposition. First, although it is generally true that increasingly frequent rewards lead to increasingly frequent actions, this reciprocation cannot go on indefinitely. At some point individuals simply cannot act that way as frequently. Second, the shorter the interval is between behavior and reward, the more likely a person is to repeat the behavior. Conversely, long intervals between behavior and reward lower the likelihood of repeat behavior. Finally, it was Homans's view that intermittent rewards are more likely to elicit repeat behavior than regular rewards are. Regular rewards lead to boredom and satiation, whereas rewards at irregular intervals (as in gambling) are very likely to elicit repeat behaviors.

The Stimulus Proposition

If in the past the occurrence of a particular stimulus, or set of stimuli, has been the occasion on which a person's action has been rewarded, then the more similar the present stimuli are to the past ones, the more likely the person is to perform the action, or some similar action. (Homans, 1974:23)

Again we look at Homans's office example: If, in the past, Person and Other found the giving and getting of advice rewarding, they are likely to engage in similar actions in similar situations in the future. Homans offered an even more down-to-earth example: "A fisherman who has cast his line into a dark pool and has caught a fish becomes more apt to fish in dark pools again" (1974:23). Homans was interested in the process of *generalization*, that is, the tendency to extend behavior to similar circumstances. In the fishing example, one aspect of generalization would be to move from fishing in dark pools to fishing in any pool with any degree of shadiness. Similarly, success in catching fish is likely to lead from one kind of fishing to another (for instance, freshwater to saltwater) or even from fishing to hunting. However, the process of *discrimination* is also of importance. That is, the actor may fish only under the specific circumstances that proved successful in the past. For one thing, if the conditions under which success occurred were too complicated, similar conditions may not stimulate behavior. If the crucial stimulus occurs too long before behavior is required, it may not actually stimulate that behavior. An actor can become oversensitized to stimuli, especially if they are very valuable to the actor. In fact, the actor could respond to irrelevant stimuli, at least until the situation is corrected by repeated failures. All this is affected by the individual's alertness or attentiveness to stimuli.

The Value Proposition

The more valuable to a person is the result of his action, the more likely he is to perform the action. (Homans, 1974:25)

In the office example, if the rewards each offers to the other are considered valuable, the actors are more likely to perform the desired behaviors than they are if the rewards are not valuable. At this point, Homans introduced the concepts of rewards and punishments. Rewards are actions with positive values; an increase in rewards is more likely to elicit the desired behavior. Punishments are actions with negative values; an increase in punishment means that the actor is less likely to manifest undesired behaviors. Homans found punishments to be an inefficient means of getting people to change their behavior, because people may react in undesirable ways to punishment. It is preferable simply not to reward undesirable behavior; then such behavior eventually becomes extinguished. Rewards are clearly to be preferred, but they may be in short supply. Homans did make it clear that this is not simply a hedonistic theory; rewards can be either materialistic (for example, money) or altruistic (helping others).

The Deprivation-Satiation Proposition

The more often in the recent past a person has received a particular reward, the less valuable any further unit of that reward becomes for him. (Homans, 1974:29)

In the office, Person and Other may reward each other so often for giving and getting advice that the rewards cease to be valuable to them. Time is crucial here; people are less likely to become satiated if particular rewards are stretched over a long period of time. At this point, Homans defined two other critical concepts: cost and profit. The cost of any behavior is defined as the rewards lost in forgoing alternative lines of action. Profit in social exchange is seen as the greater number of rewards gained over costs incurred. The latter led Homans to recast the deprivation-satiation proposition as “the greater the profit a person receives as a result of his action, the more likely he is to perform the action” (1974:31).

The Aggression-Approval Propositions

Proposition A: When a person’s action does not receive the reward he expected, or receives punishment he did not expect, he will be angry; he becomes more likely to perform aggressive behavior, and the results of such behavior become more valuable to him. (Homans, 1974:37)

In the office case, if Person does not get the advice he or she expected and Other does not receive the praise he or she anticipated, both are likely to be angry. We are surprised to find the concepts of frustration and anger in Homans’s work because they would seem to refer to mental states. In fact, Homans admitted as much: “When a person does not get what he expected, he is said to be frustrated. A purist in behaviorism would not refer to the expectation at all, because the word seems to refer . . . to a state of mind” (1974:31). Homans went on to argue that frustration of such expectations need *not* refer “only” to an internal state. It also can refer to “wholly external events,”

observable not just by Person but also by outsiders. Proposition A on aggression-approval refers only to negative emotions, whereas Proposition B deals with more positive emotions:

Proposition B: When a person's action receives the reward he expected, especially a greater reward than he expected, or does not receive punishment he expected, he will be pleased; he becomes more likely to perform approving behavior, and the results of such behavior become more valuable to him. (Homans, 1974:39)

For example, in the office, when Person gets the advice that he or she expects and Other gets the praise that he or she expects, both are pleased and are more likely to get or give advice. Advice and praise become more valuable to each one.

The Rationality Proposition

In choosing between alternative actions, a person will choose that one for which, as perceived by him at the time, the value, V , of the result, multiplied by the probability, p , of getting the result, is the greater. (Homans, 1974:43)

While the earlier propositions rely heavily on behaviorism, the rationality proposition demonstrates most clearly the influence of rational choice theory on Homans's approach. In economic terms, actors who act in accord with the rationality proposition are maximizing their utilities. Basically, people examine and make calculations about the various alternative actions open to them. They compare the amount of rewards associated with each course of action. They also calculate the likelihood that they actually will receive the rewards. Highly valued rewards will be devalued if the actors think it unlikely that they will obtain them. In contrast, lesser-valued rewards will be enhanced if they are seen as highly attainable. Thus, there is an interaction between the value of the reward and the likelihood of attainment. The most desirable rewards are those that are *both* very valuable *and* highly attainable. The least desirable rewards are those that are not very valuable and are unlikely to be attained. Homans relates the rationality proposition to the success, stimulus, and value propositions. The rationality proposition tells us that whether people will perform an action depends on their perceptions of the probability of success. But what determines this perception? Homans argues that perceptions of whether chances of success are high or low are shaped by past successes and the similarity of the present situation to past successful situations. The rationality proposition also does not tell us why an actor values one reward more than another; for this we need the value proposition. In these ways, Homans links his rationality principle to his more behavioristic propositions. In the end, Homans's theory can be condensed to a view of the actor as a rational profit seeker. However, Homans's theory was weak on mental states (Abrahamsson, 1970; Mitchell, 1978) and large-scale structures (Ekeh, 1974). For example, on consciousness Homans admitted the need for a "more fully developed psychology" (1974:45). Despite such weaknesses, Homans remained a behaviorist who worked resolutely at the level of individual behavior. He argued that large-scale structures can be understood if we adequately understand elementary social behavior. He contended that exchange processes are "identical" at the individual and societal levels, although he granted that at the societal level, "the way the fundamental processes are combined is more complex" (Homans, 1974:358).

Lesson 27**Social Exchange: Peter M. Blau-I (Topic 104-107)****Topic 104: Blau Exchange theory Introduction**

Peter Blau's (1964) goal was "an understanding of social structure on the basis of an analysis of the social processes that govern the relations between individuals and groups. The basic question . . . is how social life becomes organized into increasingly complex structures of associations among men" (1964:2). Blau's intention was to go beyond Homans's concern with elementary forms of social life and into an analysis of complex structures: "The main sociological purpose of studying processes of face-to-face interaction is to lay the foundation for an understanding of the social structures that evolve and the emergent social forces that characterize their development" (1964:13).

Blau focused on the process of exchange, which, in his view, directs much of human behavior and underlies relationships among individuals as well as among groups. In effect, Blau envisioned a four-stage sequence leading from interpersonal exchange to social structure to social change:

- Step 1: Personal exchange transactions between people give rise to . . .
- Step 2: Differentiation of status and power, which leads to . . .
- Step 3: Legitimization and organization, which sow the seeds of . . .
- Step 4: Opposition and change

Micro to Macro

On the individual level, Blau and Homans were interested in similar processes. However, Blau's concept of social exchange is limited to actions that are contingent, that depend, on rewarding reactions from others—actions that cease when expected reactions are not forthcoming. People are attracted to each other for a variety of reasons that induce them to establish social associations. Once initial ties are forged, the rewards that they provide to each other serve to maintain and enhance the bonds. The opposite situation is also possible: with insufficient rewards, an association will weaken or break. Rewards that are exchanged can be either intrinsic (for instance, love, affection, respect) or extrinsic (for instance, money, physical labor). The parties cannot always reward each other equally; when there is inequality in the exchange, a difference of power will emerge within an association.

When one party needs something from another but has nothing comparable to offer in return, four alternatives are available. First, people can force other people to help them. Second, they can find another source to obtain what they need. Third, they can attempt to get along without what they need from the others. Finally, and most important, they can subordinate themselves to the others, thereby giving the others "generalized credit" in their relationship; the others then can draw on this credit when they want them to do something. (This last alternative is, of course, the essential characteristic of power.)

Up to this point, Blau's position is similar to Homans's position, but Blau extended his theory to the level of social facts. He noted, for example, that we cannot analyze processes of social interaction apart from the social structure that surrounds them. Social structure emerges from social interaction, but once this occurs, social structures have a separate existence that affects the process of interaction. Social interaction exists first within social groups. People are attracted to a group when they feel that the relationships offer more rewards than those from other groups. Because they are attracted to the group, they want to be accepted. To be accepted, they must offer group members rewards. This involves impressing the group members by showing them that associating with the new people will be rewarding. The relationship with the group members will be solidified when the newcomers have impressed the group—when members have received the rewards they expected.

Newcomers' efforts to impress group members generally lead to group cohesion, but competition and, ultimately, social differentiation can occur when too many people actively seek to impress each other with their abilities to reward. The paradox here is that although group members with the ability to impress can be attractive associates, their impressive characteristics also can arouse fears of dependence in other group members and cause them to acknowledge their attraction only reluctantly. In the early stages of group formation, competition for social recognition among group members actually acts as a screening test for potential leaders of the group. Those best able to reward are most likely to end up in leadership positions.

Those group members with less ability to reward want to continue to receive the rewards offered by the potential leaders, and this usually more than compensates for their fears of becoming dependent on them. Ultimately, those individuals with the greater ability to reward emerge as leaders, and the group is differentiated. The inevitable differentiation of the group into leaders and followers creates a renewed need for integration. Once they have acknowledged the leader's status, followers have an even greater need for integration. Earlier, followers flaunted their most impressive qualities. Now, to achieve integration with fellow followers, they display their weaknesses. This is, in effect, a public declaration that they no longer want to be leaders. This self-deprecation leads to sympathy and social acceptance from the other also-rans. The leader (or leaders) also engages in some self-deprecation at this point to improve overall group integration. By admitting that subordinates are superior in some areas, the leader reduces the pain associated with subordination and demonstrates that he or she does not seek control over every area of group life. These types of forces serve to reintegrate the group despite its new, differentiated status. All this is reminiscent of Homans's discussion of exchange theory. Blau, however, moved to the societal level and differentiated between two types of social organization. Exchange theorists and behavioral sociologists also recognize the emergence of social organization, but there is, as we will see, a basic difference between Blau and "purer" social behaviorists on this issue. The first type, in which Blau recognized the emergent properties of social groups, emerges from the processes of exchange and competition discussed earlier. The second type of social organization is not emergent but is explicitly established to achieve specified objectives—for example, manufacturing goods that can be sold for a profit, participating in bowling tournaments, engaging in collective bargaining, and winning political victories. In discussing these two types of organization, Blau clearly moved beyond the "elementary forms of social behavior" that are typically of interest to social behaviorists.

In addition to being concerned with these organizations, Blau was interested in the subgroups within them. For example, he argued that leadership and opposition groups are found in both types of organization. In the first type, these two groups emerge out of the process of interaction. In the second, leadership and opposition groups are built into the structure of the organization. In either case, differentiation between the groups is inevitable and lays the groundwork for opposition and conflict within the organization between leaders and followers. Having moved beyond Homans's elementary forms of behavior and into complex social structures, Blau knew that he must adapt exchange theory to the societal level. Blau recognized the essential difference between small groups and large collectivities, whereas Homans minimized this difference in his effort to explain all social behavior in terms of basic psychological principles.

The complex social structures that characterize large collectives differ fundamentally from the simpler structures of small groups. A structure of social relations develops in a small group in the course of social interaction among its members. Since there is no direct social interaction among most members of a large community or entire society, some other mechanism must mediate the structure of social relations among them. (Blau, 1964:253)

This statement requires scrutiny. On the one hand, Blau clearly ruled out social behaviorism as an adequate paradigm for dealing with complex social structures. On the other hand, he ruled out the social-definitionist paradigm because he argued that social interaction and the social definitions that accompany it do not occur directly in a large-scale organization. Thus, starting from the social-behavior paradigm, Blau aligned himself with the social-facts paradigm in dealing with more complex social structures.

Topic 105-107: Mediation of Norms and Values in Exchange

For Blau, the mechanisms that mediate among the complex social structures are the norms and values (the value consensus) that exist within society: Commonly agreed upon values and norms serve as media of social life and as mediating links for social transactions. They make indirect social exchange possible, and they govern the processes of social integration and differentiation in complex social structures as well as the development of social organization and reorganization in them. (Blau, 1964:255)

Other mechanisms mediate among social structures, but Blau focused on value consensus. Looking first at social norms, Blau argued that they substitute indirect exchange for direct exchange. One member conforms to the group norm and receives approval for that conformity and implicit approval for the fact that conformity contributes to the group's maintenance and stability. In other words, the group or collectivity engages in an exchange relationship with the individual. This is in contrast to Homans's simpler notion, which focused on interpersonal exchange. Blau offered a number of examples of collectivity-individual exchanges replacing individual-individual exchanges:

Staff officials do not assist line officials in their work in exchange for rewards received from them, but furnishing this assistance is the official obligation of staff members, and in return for discharging these obligations they receive financial rewards from the company. Organized philanthropy provides another example of indirect social exchange.

In contrast to the old-fashioned lady bountiful who brought her baskets to the poor and received their gratitude and appreciation, there is no direct contact and no exchange between individual donors and recipients in contemporary organized charity. Wealthy businessmen and members of the upper class make philanthropic contributions to conform with the normative expectations that prevail in their social class and to earn the social approval of their peers, not in order to earn the gratitude of the individuals who benefit from their charity. (Blau, 1964:260) The concept of the norm in Blau's formulation moves Blau to the level of exchange between individual and collectivity, but the concept of values moves him to the largest-scale societal level and to the analysis of the relationship *among collectivities*.

For example, *particularistic* values are the media of integration and solidarity. These values serve to unite the members of a group around such things as patriotism or the good of the school or the company. These are seen as similar at the collective level to sentiments of personal attraction that unite individuals on a face-to-face basis. However, they extend integrative bonds beyond mere personal attraction. Particularistic values also differentiate the in-group from the out-group, thereby enhancing their unifying function.

Blau's analysis carries us far from Homans's version of exchange theory. The individual and individual behavior, paramount for Homans, have almost disappeared in Blau's conception. Taking the place of the individual are a wide variety of *social facts*. For example, Blau discussed groups, organizations, collectivities, societies, norms, and values. Blau's analysis is concerned with what holds large-scale social units together and what tears them apart, clearly traditional concerns of the social factist.

Although Blau argued that he was simply extending exchange theory to the societal level, in so doing he twisted exchange theory beyond recognition. He was even forced to admit that processes at the societal level are fundamentally different from those at the individual level. In his effort to extend exchange theory, Blau managed only to transform it into another macro-level theory. Blau seemed to recognize that exchange theory is concerned primarily with face-to-face relations. As a result, it needs to be complemented by other theoretical orientations that focus mainly on macro structures. Blau (1987, 1994) came to recognize this explicitly, and his later work focuses on macro-level, structural phenomena.

Stabilization of Power Structures Through Norms and Values

If an acknowledged leader is perceived as fair, norms and values are likely eventually to emerge whereby the leader's power is stabilized and reinforced by being transformed into legitimate authority (Blau, 1964:199–233). This means that the leader will be seen as having the **right** to expect compliance from subordinates. To the extent that members accept the existing distribution of power and authority, and are also satisfied with the rewards they receive, they may augment the leader's authority by rewarding one another with social approval for their compliance with the leader (or by showing disapproval for noncompliance). This is especially likely if the values and norms that develop are consistent with members' own personal values and identities.

In the final analysis, acceptance of an authority structure rests on favorable reward/cost outcomes for members (along with their expectations of future benefits). However, the specific terms of the exchange do not have to be negotiated from scratch with each transaction when these terms are normatively defined and legitimated in terms of shared values. In some cases compliance might be expected even in the absence of short-term benefits in exchange for a continued share in long-range benefits. In other words, the relationship moves beyond a “tit-for-tat” situation in which each specific transaction must be balanced and toward a longer-term perspective in which short-term imbalances are expected eventually to be balanced. In a work situation, for example, people fulfill the requirements of their jobs each day, even though they do not get paid until the end of the week or the month.

These internal group process do not occur in a vacuum, however. The development of values and norms that legitimate a group’s power and leadership structure is likely to reflect the influence of the surrounding cultural and institutional context in which many of the relevant norms and values will have already been internalized through the socialization process. For example, the norm of reciprocity predisposes people to be prepared to engage in the give and take of exchange transactions by returning favors granted by others; the norm does not have to be created from scratch by each group. Similarly, people who enjoy the benefits of membership in a group are expected to follow the widely established cultural norm of doing their “fair share” for the good of the group. When the overall reward/cost outcomes are perceived by all parties as fair, both leaders and subordinates will have an interest in stabilizing their relationship through legitimating values and norms instead of relying solely on short-run cost/ reward balance in their exchange transactions. By holding legitimate authority, the leader is protected from the necessity of continually having to negotiate or provide short-term payoffs to members to maintain their dependency and indebtedness. At the same time subordinates are protected from excessive demands that a domineering or exploitative leader might impose or from an arbitrary reduction in rewards on which subordinates have become dependent. Legitimation of a leadership structure enables a group to move toward long-range goals that are intended to provide eventual benefits to all, even when this involves short-term sacrifices. A leader whose authority is reinforced by the group’s values and norms will be able to persuade members to incur the necessary costs in striving for such long-range goals without any immediate payoff except the internal satisfaction and social approval that results from normative conformity—plus the hope of future rewards. In addition, if members have an intrinsic commitment to the group’s activities or goals, or the ideals and values they represent, this provides an additional source of rewards.

Sometimes, however, the legitimacy of a particular authority structure breaks down, either because of changes in the exchange process itself or changes in people’s preferences and expectations. Leaders, for example, may seek to increase their compliance demands (such as when governments raise taxes, for example) or reduce the rewards for compliance (such as reductions in pay). Alternatively, members may reduce their level of compliance (by cheating on their taxes, for example, or reducing their level of job performance). When perceptions of a leader’s unfairness emerge among subordinates, the stage is set for the development of opposition movements, and such movements sometimes succeed in overthrowing established power and authority structures and establishing new ones.

Lesson 28**Social Exchange: Peter M. Blau-II (Topic 108-110)****Topic 108-109: Exchange and power**

Richard Emerson and Peter Blau have both offered analyses of power differentials which root them in exchange relationships but also look beyond individual (or "dyadic") relationships to larger structural settings. Both see power as originating when valued services are provided as part of an unbalanced exchange, so that one party places a higher value on the outcome than the other. The approach is also that adopted by Homans in his more recent work.

The crucial notion here is that one partner in the exchange is dependent on the other for services, and values those services more than the other person values anything he can offer.¹² This is the argument Blau uses in discussing the balance of power in love relationships, which we discussed earlier. However, it can be extended to include the coercive aspects of power and the fact that someone who is in a position of power has the potential to secure submission and compliance.

Thus, in a much-cited article which appeared in 1962, Richard Emerson listed the conditions determining the extent to which the supplier of a good or service (such as weekly wages or companionship) exerts power over those receiving the supplies. The supplier's power is greater the more it is true that (1) the individual who wants a service has nothing the supplier needs that he or she can offer in return; (2) the recipient has no alternative to turn to; (3) the recipient cannot use direct coercion to extract the services he or she needs; and (4) the recipient cannot resign himself or herself to doing without the services or find a substitute. The second and fourth conditions echo the conditions economists use to describe monopoly. However, in economic exchange the result is simply that the buyer pays more, whereas in social exchange the supplier can make general demands and secure compliance. Blau's account of power follows on from Emerson's, as indeed, has much more recent empirical work on exchange and power. Blau defines

power as; the ability of persons or groups to impose their will on others despite resistance through deterrence either in the form of withholding regularly supplied rewards or in the form of punishment. In the former as well as the latter constitute, in effect, negative sanction If [a person] regularly renders needed services (others) cannot readily obtain elsewhere ... their unilateral dependence obligates them to comply with his requests lest he cease to continue to meet their needs.

As does Homans', this approach has both similarities to, and differences from, those of functionalism and conflict theory. Conflict theorists' major interest is in the conditions that support what rational choice theorists might call monopolies, in other words, in the ways groups establish and maintain a position of control over scarce and valued resources. In considerably greater detail than Emerson or Blau, conflict theorists analyze the particular institutional conditions under which groups can increase the degree to which the four conditions of power hold. For example, in the case of the Communist Party in communist states, they identify ways in which the party was able to monopolize services that are

essential to people through centralized socialism and bureaucratic organization (the second and fourth conditions again).

By contrast, Blau and Emerson emphasize the exchange relationship at the core of inequality. Unlike most conflict theorists, they note the independent importance of the fourth condition—that the recipients of services are not prepared to do without them. At the same time, Blau, in particular, pays far more attention to the coercive and monopolistic aspects of power and its resulting inequalities than do most functionalists. The functionalist theory of social stratification, for example, argues that higher rewards for some occupations than for others are "functional" in that they induce people with rare talents and skills to fill those occupations. The exchange perspective similarly identifies a link between power and exchange of goods or services and relates the value of a service to the price its supplier can command. However, functionalism pays little attention to the fact that groups may, in effect, distort the "market," for example, by introducing barriers to social mobility and by maintaining a form of society in which people cannot choose whom to turn to as employer, landlord, or physical protector. Exchange theory's discussion of coercive power recognizes the importance of "distortions," and it also anchors power relationships in myriad individual actions, not "society" in the abstract.

There is considerable evidence to support a general link between relative power and the supply of services. Of particular note is Blood and Wolfe's study of the balance of power between husbands and wives. Blood and Wolfe argue that the more crucial the husband's skills to the family's survival and well-being and the more complete his control of its wealth and resources the more patriarchal the family. They suggest that this is because the husband's or wife's say in decisions is a direct result of what each contributes, not through some conscious calculation of relative power but because the partner who receives more than he or she gives feels both indebted for the past and dependent on future contributions.

Blood and Wolfe tend to emphasize the relationship between power and obligations. However, there is also evidence that normative factors affect how people behave, and Blau believes that power can rest on either basis. In families where the wife is the major breadwinner there is a tendency for the women to cede some of their financial power to their husbands. A study by David Morley of family television viewing habits in Great Britain showed that when either men or children were at home, women almost invariably deferred to them in their choice of program. The women felt that they "ought" to be the peacemakers in the family, giving other members power to choose by default.

The reader will have noticed that, as so often in rational choice theory, the examples cited involve small groups. As Richard Michels notes, "According to the view of rational choice theory, a collective authority will be established and will persist the greater the number of actors in a system who draw benefits from such a system."¹³⁵ However, in many cases, what is going on cannot be explained in this way: it "involves power with its own unique qualities A strong and powerful government ... has the capacity to enforce decisions that are harmful for nearly everybody, at least in the short run[Conversely] in a society in which problems are great and are growing in complexity, a government that lives on the immediate return of benefits for popular support will soon slide into insolvency and lose its position."

Topic 110: Exchange among Structures

The emergence of power and authority structures enables leaders to control and coordinate the actions of subordinates in developing a collective line of action. The extent of this control will reflect the degree of dependency among group members, the value of the rewards they anticipate from the group's collective action, and their commitment to the group's legitimating values and norms. In some cases this collective action may be oriented primarily toward goals set by the leader, with members being compensated for their contributions. Alternatively, goals may be based on group members' consensus, with the expectation that all will share the rewards of goal accomplishment. In either case, the challenge for the leader is to coordinate members' actions so that they fit together in a collective line of action. This means it is the group, not its constituent members, that becomes the interacting unit, and members may be seen as acting on behalf of the group or its leader. Many examples may be cited where it is the group, not the individual, that is the appropriate unit involved in some line of action. For example, even though the individual players in a football game may strive for outstanding individual performances, the overall project is that of the team. Or, when labor union officials decide to go on strike, or to accept a contract offer and go back to work, their members' actions should be understood as part of the union's overall line of action. Members do not decide as individuals whether to strike or go back to work (unless organizational discipline has broken down), though of course they may vote in order to establish the collective decision that they agree to follow. The same occurs in military parades or battlefield campaigns, where individual soldiers act as part of their unit and not on their own behalf. Is a leadership structure necessary for a group line of action? Or could a collective line of action be developed by persons who are equals, with no power and dependency relations? In order for coordinated action to emerge spontaneously, it would be necessary for all the parties involved to perceive that their personal goals could best be advanced through collaborative action. There would also have to be agreement on what this action is and what the contributions of each party should be—without being directed by anyone with authority. For long term projects of any type, reliance on the spontaneous organization is a precarious strategy. Even if the members agree on the goal, there may be disagreement on strategies to use in accomplishing it or on the contributions each member should make. These difficulties can be overcome by the emergence of a clear leadership or authority structure. In an athletic context, for example, even though all members may want to win, a coach or team leader is still needed to coordinate the actions of individual team members to achieve the highest possible level of effectiveness.

A group organized to act as a collective unit is able to initiate interaction with other groups that are also organized as collective units. Whether this occurs will depend initially on network ties between members of different groups. Both individuals and groups vary in terms of their network linkages. When network ties exist (or can be established) between groups, the development of exchange relationships will depend on the reward/cost outcomes expected for the groups involved. But this evaluation of alternatives and potential outcomes will involve the group itself as a collective unit rather than the individual members acting on their own behalf. This does not mean that individuals do not also seek to benefit personally through such exchanges. But individuals' decisions and actions are part of the group's line of action. The process whereby power and authority structures provide the possibility for collective action is essentially the foundation for meso and macro level organizations and institutional structures. Macro structures may be regarded as consisting of relationships among groups (or organizations) while micro structures consist only

of individuals. For our purposes, micro structures involve face-to-face relations while meso structures include both direct and indirect relations that develop in between the micro level and the macro structures of the overall society. However, meso and macro level groups and organizations have no independent existence and cannot act except through their members. Thus the actions of individual members should be seen as contributing to, or helping to constitute, part of the collective line of action of these larger structures. Moreover, regardless of its size, once an organization is established, its collective action may be continued despite turnover in the group's membership.

Lesson 29**Social Exchange: Peter M. Blau-III (Topic 111-113)****Topic 111: Exchange among Structures**

The exchange patterns that develop among different groups and organizations are similar to the processes that occur among individuals. Particular transactions may be either balanced or imbalanced. If balanced, relations of reciprocal interdependence will be established. Imbalanced exchanges will result in differentiation of status and power at the group level. The dominant group can organize subordinate groups into an even larger group or organization to engage in joint line of action. One big collection of subordinate groups/organizations. Coalition or alliance for action. Various patterns of internal exchange are likely to develop within alliance. Additional differentiation of status and power within. Internal subgroups may get organized and engage in exchange transactions with other individuals/groups within or outside the coalition. When relationships are between similar subgroups in different organization, stage is set for the emergence of new grouping for the pursuing of distinct goals. Another alliance. Complex society has an elaborate network of associations. Associations are involved in numerous kinds of exchange transactions. Many of these exchanges reflect varying degrees of imbalance and consequent relations of power and dependency. Bureaucratic organizations dominate almost all institutional sectors of society. Linked in various kinds of inter-organizational relationships. Modern society is honeycombed with innumerable overlapping and interpenetrating groups and associations of various types.

Topic 112-113: Legitimation versus Opposition to Power Structures

The legitimation of power structures through values and norms does not guarantee that members will continue indefinitely to be totally satisfied with the existing distribution of costs and rewards. Power structures are frequently resisted and sometimes overthrown and replaced. This is true both in small-scale groups and large-scale complex associations as well as in the overall society. In the long run, the legitimacy of structures of power and authority rests on reward/cost outcomes that are widely perceived as fair. But if conditions should change, the stage is set for the formation of an opposition movement and, in an extreme case, the overthrow of the existing power structure (Blau, 1964:224–252).

There are numerous processes that could adversely affect reward/cost outcomes for subordinates and lead to dissatisfaction. For example, authority figures may begin to take advantage of subordinates' dependency by increasing the demands made on them, which they would see as unfair. Or, even if demands remain stable, the reward/cost ratio may become relatively less attractive as members become satiated with the rewards they receive. (This is probably less likely for employees who are dependent on the financial compensation they receive for their livelihood, but could readily apply to members of voluntary organizations.) Or members may become aware of other groups in which reward/cost outcomes are more favorable, so feel disadvantaged by comparison. Power and authority structures are inherently precarious and potentially unstable. Despite shared values and norms, members' continuing commitment rests in the long run on favorable reward/cost outcomes. Dissatisfaction with existing reward/cost outcomes does not guarantee that an opposition movement will be developed or the power structure overthrown.

People may fear that efforts to promote change would be unsuccessful, and that the negative consequences of failure would be even worse than putting up with the existing situation. Even if an opposition movement is formed, some dissatisfied members may be reluctant to participate because they see such a struggle as risky and futile. Some dissatisfied members may simply leave the group and join alternative groups with a more favorable reward/cost outcome. (People may leave their current employment, for example, to take a better-paying job.) Or, a leader may take advantage of his or her power to insure that members do not have the opportunity to organize themselves, in which case members' efforts to do so are likely to be seen as involving unacceptably high costs.

The relationship between legitimation mechanisms and opposition mechanisms can be seen as one of more or less continuous dialectical conflict (Blau, 1964:312–338). The emergence of strong authority structures invariably creates the conditions for the formation of opposition movements. For one thing, the authority structure rests, as we have seen, on resources the leader controls that can be used to reward subordinates for their compliance. But, to the extent that a leader is able to increase the resources at his or her disposal, he or she is likely to arouse dissatisfaction on the part of subordinates who would like to see these resources distributed more generously. Thus, for example, the loss of legitimacy of the Communist Party in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s reflected in part the widespread resentment of the affluence that high-level Communist Party officials enjoyed at a time when the emerging market system left many people without the basic economic survival guarantees to which they had become accustomed.

The social dynamics involved in opposition movements are similar to those described earlier in connection with the emergence of power structures from imbalanced exchanges. That is, those who are dissatisfied and desire change will begin to interact and to evaluate and debate alternative goals and strategies, seek to mobilize support, and so on. Out of this preliminary process a leader may eventually emerge by convincing others that his or her ideas will prove more effective (or rewarding) than the competing ideas that may be offered by others. Imbalanced exchanges will develop if the emergent opposition leader is able to create dependencies and obligations on the part of fellow members to insure their participation despite the risks and sacrifices that may be involved. Wide variations may emerge in the specific goals of opposition movements. These can include changes in the distribution of costs and rewards, replacing current authority figures, or revolutionary overthrow of the existing structure and establishment of a new system. If the opposition movement is successful in redressing grievances or implementing change, this will reinforce the opposition leader's position and may lead to continued mobilization to pursue additional goals. On the other hand, if an opposition movement is unable to get organized by generating a leadership structure or consensus on strategies, those who are dissatisfied will find they are unable to act consistently as a unit. The refusal of totalitarian governments to tolerate the organization of opposition parties reflects their awareness that unorganized opposition is not very effective.

Thus the success of dissatisfied subordinates in opposing or replacing the existing power structure depends on the emergence of its own leadership structure. The effectiveness of opposition leaders will depend on the development of consensus regarding specific goals and strategies and the mobilization of individuals' commitments to incur the costs that are involved in pursuing these

goals through collective action. In addition, just as the existing authority structure is stabilized by legitimating values and norms, so also the opposition movement may be reinforced by the development of opposition ideals. This opposition ideology is particularly important for neutralizing the conservative influence of legitimating values and norms. Some of those participating in the opposition movement may have previously internalized the legitimating values and norms and therefore feel ambivalent about participating in the movement. An opposition ideology, however, can assure participants that their struggles are not undertaken for narrow, selfish interests but are consistent with high moral principles, superior to those being practiced by the current regime, and that their success will lead to greater benefits for all. Thus, for example, many participants in the American civil rights movement attempted to justify their demonstrations to promote integration and justice in terms of traditional Judeo-Christian teachings that were not adequately implemented in our society. By claiming the moral “high road,” participants and leaders were able to criticize those who failed to join the struggle as accepting an unjust system. Even when an opposition movement is not completely successful, it may still stimulate reform and lead to improved reward/cost outcomes for subordinates (Blau, 1964:301–309). Appeals to abstract values and norms, both to support existing authority structures and to mobilize support for opposition movements, are usually much more fully developed in larger and more complex systems. Such processes are not as critical in small-scale systems because of the opportunity for immediate and direct negotiation of costs and rewards. Large-scale systems, in contrast, are more likely to involve multiple and complex series of indirect exchanges between individuals or groups who are not in direct contact with one other. Thus internalization of the appropriate values and norms becomes more crucial for shaping behavior and interaction patterns, as opposed to relying on ad hoc agreements. In the following section, reliance on values and norms will be seen as a major feature of large-scale institutional structures.

Lesson 30**Michael Hechter (Topic 114-117)****Topic 114: Michael Hechter Rational choice theory**

Assumption: People are rational.

Base their actions on what they perceive to be the most effective means to goal. Constantly weighing alternative means against alternative ends. Choose between the means and ends. Hence the term rational choice. The way to understand much of how people behave toward each other is by seeing them as rational decision makers. Individuals reveal preferences or hierarchies of utility (value) They seek to maximize these preferences. Have their own rationale. Explanation.

Some of the basics of rational choice theory by Hechter has been formulated by Turner like:

- i. Humans are purposive and goal oriented.
- ii. Humans have sets of hierarchically ordered preferences or utilities.
- iii. In choosing lines of behavior, humans make rational calculations about:
 - A. The utility of alternative lines of conduct with reference to the preference hierarchy.
 - B. The costs of each alternative in terms of utilities foregone.
 - C. The best way to maximize utility.
- iv. Emergent social phenomena are ultimately the result of rational choices made by utility-maximizing individuals. (Phenomena may include: social structures, collective decisions, collective behavior.)
- v. Emergent phenomena that arise from rational choices constitute a set of parameters that determine.
 - A. The distribution of resources among individuals.
 - B. The distribution of opportunities for various lines of behavior.
 - C. The distribution and nature of norms and obligations in a situation.

Rational action is its own explanation. An action can be held as “explained” if and only if it is treated as “rational”: Action which can be accounted for. It contains no black boxes.

Topic 115: The basic problem of order in rational choice

Interdependence of individuals for goods and services. Necessity of groups for securing “goods.” In rational choice theory, groups are there to provide or produce “goods” for its members. “*Joint goods*” produced by the group jointly. Joint goods vary in their degree of ‘publicness.’

Highly ‘public good’ available to the group and others as well. Its use by one does not diminish its supply for others. Road.

Private goods produced for consumption of producers. Consumption by one reduces the capacity of others to consume. Private goods are kept out of reach of others.

Problem of order revolves around public goods. It is described as *free-rider* dilemma. Free use. No cost of its production to users. Rational to use it. If everybody wants free ride, then joint goods will never be produced.

Dilemma.

What are choices? If a good is highly public, then public can be coerced to contribute to its production. Or can be induced by being rewarded (salaries, praise). Exclude the non contributors. Decrease its publicness. Impose user fees/prices.

For rational choice theory, the basis of social order revolves around:

Creating group structures to produce goods that are consumed in ways that limit free riding.

Limiting consumption without contributing in some way to the production.

Rationalists go about establishing groups that create normative obligations to contribute. Enforce the normative conformity. Diminishes the problem of free riding. Social solidarity seen as a problem of social control.

Topic 116: The Basis of Social control: Dependence, Monitoring, and Sanctioning

Groups exist to provide joint goods. Some individuals depend more on groups than others. Depends on group for resources that rank high in hierarchy of the individual needs. Dependence determines the potential power for group on that individual. Dependency over group is the rational for creating rules and obligations.

No alternative available for the valued goods.

- Lack of information for alternatives sources.
- Costs of exiting the group are high.
- Moving costs to another group are high.
- Personal ties are strong.
- Rules ensure access to this joint good.

Dependence is incentive to create normative obligations.

- The extensiveness of normative obligations in a group is related to the degree of dependence.
- Extensive norms guide and regulate.
- Extensiveness of a group alone has no necessary implications for group solidarity.
- Crucial that all members comply with the norms. 
- Compliance depends upon group's capacity to control.

Groups' control capacity is a function of:

Monitoring, and

Sanctioning.

Monitoring is the process of detecting the non-conformity to group norms and obligations. Sanctioning is the use of rewards and punishments to induce conformity. Lower the monitoring capacity, the lower to ensure compliance. Without monitoring sanctioning cannot effectively serve as an inducement to conformity. For Hechter, solidarity is the product of dependence, monitoring, and sanctioning.

Topic 117: Group solidarity

Control capacity different in two types of groups:

- compensatory group and
- obligatory group

Compensatory group: A grouping produces joint good for market and does not consume itself. Group control capacity is reduced. Profit from sale used to buy conformity. Compensation bought for the labor provided. Low dependence on group, low social solidarity. Reduces the extensiveness of norms. Person can sell his labor elsewhere. Rational to leave the group.

Obligatory groups: Produce joint goods for members' own consumption. Rational to create obligations for contribution from members. Higher the dependence on joint good, higher the incentive for conformity. No easy alternative to the joint good. Monitoring and sanctioning efficient. Sanctions for violation very costly. Expulsion from the group possible. Sanctioning and monitoring costs low. High social solidarity.

Compensatory groups are large to produce marketable goods.

Obligatory groups are smaller and provide goods for their members that cannot be obtained in market. High solidarity. The extent to which members' private resources are contributed to a collective end. High solidarity can be achieved only in obligatory groups. Here dependence, monitoring and sanctioning is high. As obligatory groups get large, their monitoring and sanctioning capacity decreases.

Gemeinschaft vs. geselleschaft i.e. primary vs. secondary groups; mechanical vs. organic solidarity. Nature of joint goods consumed by members or produced for market determines the level of dependence of individuals on the group. Also determines the control capacity of group. High and low solidarity follow from rational choice of individuals.

Lesson 31**James Coleman-I (Topic 118-120)****Topic 118: James Coleman Rational choice theory Introduction**

Although it influenced the development of exchange theory, rational choice theory was generally marginal to mainstream sociological theory. It is largely through the efforts of one man, James S. Coleman, that rational choice theory has become one of the “hot” theories in contemporary sociology. For one thing, in 1989 Coleman founded a journal, *Rationality and Society*, devoted to the dissemination of work from a rational choice perspective. For another, Coleman (1990b) published an enormously influential book, *Foundations of Social Theory*, based on this perspective. Finally, Coleman became president of the American Sociological Association in 1992 and used that forum to push rational choice theory and to present an address entitled “The Rational Reconstruction of Society” (Coleman, 1993b).

Since we have outlined the basic tenets of rational choice theory, it would be useful to begin with Coleman’s (1989) introductory comments to the first issue of *Rationality and Society*. The journal was to be interdisciplinary because rational choice theory (or, as Coleman calls it, “the paradigm of rational action” [1989:5]) is the only theory with the possibility of producing paradigmatic integration. Coleman does not hesitate to argue that the approach operates from a base in methodological individualism and to use rational choice theory as the micro-level base for the explanation of macro-level phenomena. Even more interesting is what Coleman’s approach does not find “congenial”:

work that is methodologically holistic, floating at the system level without recourse to the actors whose actions generate that system . . . the view of action as purely expressive, the view of action as irrational, and also the view of action as something wholly caused by outside forces without the intermediation of intention or purpose. It excludes that empirical work widely carried out in social science in which individual behavior is “explained” by certain factors or determinants without any model of action whatsoever. (Coleman, 1989:6)

Thus, a large portion of work in sociology is excluded from the pages of *Rationality and Society*. Not to be excluded, however, are macro-level concerns and their linkage to rational action. Beyond such academic concerns, Coleman wants work done from a rational choice perspective to have practical relevance to our changing social world. For example, Heckathorn and Broadhead (1996) have examined the issue of public policies aimed at AIDS prevention from a rational choice perspective.

Topic 119: Foundations of rational choice theory

Coleman argues that sociology should focus on social systems but that such macro phenomena must be explained by factors internal to them, prototypically individuals. He favors working at this level for several reasons, including the fact that data usually are gathered at the individual level and then aggregated or composed to yield the system level. Among the other reasons for favoring a focus on the individual level is that this is where “interventions” ordinarily are made to create social changes. As we will see, central to Coleman’s perspective is the idea that social theory is not merely an academic exercise but should affect the social world through such “interventions.”

Given his focus on the individual, Coleman recognizes that he is a methodological individualist, although he sees his particular perspective as a “special variant” of that orientation. His view is special in the sense that it accepts the idea of emergence and that while it focuses on factors internal to the system, those factors are not necessarily individual actions and orientations. That is, micro-level phenomena other than individuals can be the focus of his analysis.

Coleman’s rational choice orientation is clear in his basic idea that “persons act purposively toward a goal, with the goal (and thus the actions) shaped by values or preferences” (1990b:13). But Coleman (1990b:14) then goes on to argue that for most theoretical purposes, he will need a more precise conceptualization of the rational actor derived from economics, one that sees the actors choosing those actions that will maximize utility, or the satisfaction of their needs and wants. There are two key elements in his theory—actors and resources. Resources are those things over which actors have control and in which they have some interest. Given these two elements, Coleman details how their interaction leads to the system level:

A minimal basis for a social system of action is two actors, each having control over resources of interest to the other. It is each one’s interest in resources under the other’s control that leads the two, as purposive actors, to engage in actions that involve each other . . . a system of action. . . . It is this structure, together with the fact that the actors are purposive, each having the goal of maximizing the realization of his interests, that gives the interdependence, or systemic character, to their actions.(Coleman, 1990b:29)

Although he has faith in rational choice theory, Coleman does not believe that this perspective, at least as yet, has all the answers. But it is clear that he believes that it can move in that direction, since he argues that the “success of a social theory based on rationality lies in successively diminishing that domain of social activity that cannot be accounted for by the theory” (Coleman, 1990b:18). Coleman recognizes that in the real world people do not always behave rationally, but he feels that this makes little difference in his theory: “My implicit assumption is that the theoretical predictions made here will be substantively the same whether the actors act precisely according to rationality as commonly conceived or deviate in the ways that have been observed” (1990b:506; Inbar, 1996).

Given his orientation to individual rational action, it follows that Coleman’s focus in terms of the micro-macro issue is the micro-to-macro linkage, or how the combination of individual actions brings about the behavior of the system. Although he accords priority to this issue, Coleman also is interested in the macro-to-micro linkage, or how the system constrains the orientations of actors. Finally, he evinces an interest in the micro-micro aspect of the relationship, or the impact of individual actions on other individual actions.

In spite of this seeming balance, there are at least three major weaknesses in Coleman’s approach. First, he accords overwhelming priority to the micro-to-macro issue, thereby giving short shrift to the other relationships. Second, he ignores the macromacro issue. Finally, his causal arrows go in only one direction; in other words, he ignores the dialectical relationship among and between micro and macro phenomena. Utilizing his rational choice approach, Coleman explains a series of macro-level phenomena. His basic position is that theorists need to keep their conceptions of the actor constant and generate from those micro-constants various images of macro-level phenomena. In

this way, differences in macro phenomena can be traced to different structures of relations at the macro level and not to variations at the micro level. A key step in the micro-to-macro movement is the granting of the authority and rights possessed by one individual to another. This action tends to lead to the subordination of one actor to another. More important, it creates the most basic macro phenomenon—an acting unit consisting of two people, rather than two independent actors. The resulting structure functions independently of the actors. Instead of maximizing his or her own interests, in this instance an actor seeks to realize the interests of another actor, or of the independent collective unit. Not only is this a different social reality, it is one that “has special deficiencies and generates special problems” (Coleman, 1990b:145). Given his applied orientation, Coleman is interested in the diagnosis and solution of these problems.

Topic 120: Group solidarity

Actors have resources. They are interested in the resources of others. Buy, borrow, and exchange the resources. Resultant system of interaction between the actors. Resultantly social organization revolve around transactions between those who have and those who seek resources. Transactions can occur between individuals directly, and Also occur indirectly through intermediaries. Can also occur in markets.

Here resources are aggregated and bought and sold according to law of supply and demand.

Coleman conceived resources as *rights to act*. Right to determine the exchange rate. Price. Right can be given away in exchange for other rights to act. Authorizing others to determine the norms of exchange. Authority relations consist of two types:

1. Conjoint authority: Actors unilaterally give control of their rights to act to another.

Vesting of authority in others seen in the best interests of all actors.

2. Disjoint authority: Actors give their rights away for extrinsic compensation (money).

For Coleman, disjoint authority model is applicable to norms. Transfer of rights of control to a system of rules that are sanctioned by others. Norms are built by virtue of individuals giving up their rights to control resources in exchange for expected benefits. Norms taken as given. People invoke them to explain individual behavior. How norms can emerge and be maintained? Norms are initiated and maintained by people. People see benefits in abiding by and harm stemming from the violation. People are willing to give up some control over their own behavior. In return they gain some control (through norms) over the behavior of others. End result: the control which was held by each alone, becomes widely distributed over the whole set of actors, who exercise that control through norms. Actors may not act in terms of their self-interest but must act in the interest of the group. People maximize their utility by partially surrendering rights of control over themselves and gaining partial control over others. There is equilibrium in the case of norms.

For Coleman two key questions in understanding social solidarity are:

1. What conditions within a larger collectivity of individuals create demand for rational actors to give their rights of control over resources to normative rules and sanctions associated with these rules?
2. What conditions make realization of effective control by norms and sanctions?

Lesson 32**James Coleman-II (Topic 121-123)****Topic 121: Group Solidarity**

Two assumptions that help in group solidarity:

1. There is demand for norms; and
2. Realization of norms through effective sanctioning, i. e. making the norms effective.

There is demand for norms:

- To counter the *negative externalities* (Harmful results in a particular context);
- To enable actors to bargain and reduce negative externalities;
- To create rules that govern the exchange. Market. Regulating the transactions.
- To control the free riding. Some actors do not contribute to production of joint good. Rein in the violators.
- To control the abusive use of authority, or any source of threat to others.

Actors see that by giving up some of their rights of control over their resources, they can reduce externalities. As the group size increases, individual bargaining becomes difficult. Big markets determine the price of resources i. e. supply and demand principle. Markets create their own negative externalities i. e. cheating, hoarding. So, there is demand for norms to regulate transactions. Systems of norms, trust, and authority represent ways to organize actors. Norms can be proscriptive as well as prescriptive. Realization of norms through their being proscriptive as well as prescriptive.

Proscriptive norms: the rule that prohibit certain type of behavior.

Impose *negative sanctions*.

Prescriptive norms: What is to be done?

Positive sanctions for conformity. Approval, support, esteem.

Operation of norms possible in small groups. Small groups have high social solidarity.

Topic 122: Principles of group solidarity

- Turner summarized Coleman's principles of group solidarity in four propositions.
- I. The level of interest in creating norms among actors who are producing a joint good increases with:
 - A. The intensity of negative externalities the group experiences collectively.
 - B. The rate of free riding in the production of goods.
 - C. The level of actors' dependence on the production of the joint good.
- II. The extensiveness of the norms created by actors with an interest in regulating the production of a joint good increases with:

- A. The actors' dependence on the production of the joint goods.
- B. The degree to which actors consume the joint good they produce.
- C. The proportion of all actors receiving utilities for the production of joint good.
- D. The rates of communication among members engaged in the production of a joint good which is:
 - 1. Negatively related to the size of the group.
 - 2. Positively related to the density of group network ties.
- III. The ratio of prospective to prescriptive content of norms regulating the production of joint goods increases with:
 - The capacity to lower the costs of monitoring conformity to normative obligations, which in turn is positively related to:
 - 1. Rates of communication among actors.
 - 2. Density of networks ties.
 - 3. Ratio of informal to formal sanctioning.
 - 4. Ratio of positive to negative sanctioning.
 - B. The ratio of positive to negative sanctioning is positively related to the ratio of informal to formal sanctioning.
- IV. The level of social solidarity among actors producing joint goods is likely to increase when:
 - A. Actors' dependence on joint goods is high.
 - B. The extensiveness of norms is great.
 - C. The ratio of prescriptive to proscriptive content of norms is high.
 - D. The ratio of positive to negative sanctions is high.
 - E. The costs for monitoring and sanctioning are low.
 - F. The proportion of actors receiving utilities from the joint good is high.

Topic 123: Concluding remarks about rational choice theory

Three conclusions:

1. Social action in the general case depends on beliefs.
2. Beliefs, actions, attitudes should be treated as rational. All based on reasons perceived by social actors as valid.
3. Reasons of the “cost-benefit” type should not be given more attention than they deserve.

This is criticism: Rationality is one thing, expected utility another.

Rationality postulate:

- ✧ Social actors try to act in congruence with reasons they perceive as valid.
- ✧ They explain their behavior is normally meaningful to them.
- ✧ The context makes these reasons of the “cost-benefit” type.
- ✧ Action to be explained by its meaning to the actor.
- ✧ As part of general theory of rationality it is said:
- ✧ Any collective phenomenon is the effect of human individual actions.
- ✧ The action of an observed actor is always understandable. (provided the observer has sufficient information)
- ✧ The causes of the actor’s action are the reasons he has to undertake it.
- ✧ Strength of reasons is a function of the context.
- ✧ Reasons for capital punishment accepted at one time may not be accepted in another time. Context.
- ✧ RCT criticized from many quarters for being overly ambitious for seeking to replace all other theoretical perspectives.
- ✧ RCT attacked for underplaying or ignoring things such as culture and chance events.
- ✧ Smelser argued:
- ✧ RCT has degenerated as a result of internal evolution or responses to external criticisms.
- ✧ It has developed the “capacity to explain everything and hence nothing” (Smelser, 1992).
- ✧ The number of supporters of rational choice theory is increasing in sociology.
- ✧ So is the resistance to it by those who support other theoretical perspectives.

Lesson 33**Interactionism-I (Topic 124-127)****Topic 124: Introduction – Micro sociological analysis**

Micro Sociology: that focuses primarily on persons and interpersonal relations. Micro decisions can also be aggregated to have huge effects. Individuals or families take decisions to have children or migrate. Have effects on population. Micro sociology grew as counterpoint to the dominance of structural functionalism.

- Focus on action system, which determines actions.
- Systems shape the humans.

Micro sociologists emphasized on the other side: social system was the creation of humans. Instead of order being imposed on individuals by the system, social order is produced from below – the human interaction.

- Micro sociology places emphasis on:
 - a. The face-to-face interaction. Focus on concrete humans.
 - b. The meanings rather than on the functions. Interpretive approach.
 - Look at the subjective motivations of actions.
 - Meanings that people assigned to their actions.
 - Verbal and non verbal symbols create meanings.
 - c. The lived experiences rather than an abstracted concept of “society.”

The exchange of symbols allows to form solidarity by allowing common definitions of reality. Greeting rituals have important symbolic meanings. Interpretations depend on past experiences.

Three main approaches to micro-sociological analysis.

1. Phenomenology Emphasizes on close observation of human experience.

- The methods ordinary people use:
 - To construct their own everyday understandings of social life.
 - To confront practical challenges.
 - To shape reality through the ways in which they conceptualize it.
 - Bottom up approach to study in culture.

2. Symbolic Interactionism

- Emphasizes the way in which people develop:
 - Their own identities
 - Their senses of how society works.

- What constitutes fair play during interaction.
- All knowledge achieved in practically situated action.
- 3. “Dramaturgical” approach of Erving Goffman.
 - Emphasis on lived experiences.
- Something dramatized, acted upon.
- Suggests that people are always staging their performance for others.
- How they play their roles in groups? Lived experiences.
- Institutionalized. Govern the role-playing.

Topic 125: Edmund Husserl Phenomenology

In Europe, phenomenology began as a project of German philosopher, Husserl. Alfred Schutz took his concepts and converted them into interactionist analysis. Turner explained four features of his work relevant to phenomenology as:

1. The basic philosophical dilemma.
2. The properties of consciousness.
3. The critique of naturalistic empiricism.
4. The philosophical alternative to social science.

1. Basic dilemma:

- What is real?
- What actually exists in world?
- How is it possible to know what exists?

Husserl reasoned:

- Humans know about the world only through experience. For experience, senses mediate through mental consciousness. Awareness. The existence of other people, values, norms, and physical objects have to be experienced. Experiencing is registered on one’s conscious awareness. No direct contact with reality; only through the process of mind.

Understand the process:

- ✧ How this process of consciousness operate?
- ✧ How it influences human affairs?
- ✧ How experience creates a sense of external reality – became the central concern of phenomenology.

2. Properties of consciousness

Humans operate in a taken for granted world that permeate their mental life. Humans sense the existence of the world having material and non material objects.

Two conceptions of the world:

- ✧ a. This world is taken for granted. Reality.
- ✧ b. Humans can experience this world or reality.

People experience through their own consciousness. May not be correct. How to ascertain what is real? Can be biased. Husserl criticised the natural sciences.

3. Critique of naturalistic empiricism

- ✧ Science assumes that the world exists out there. External to human senses.
- ✧ Can be studied through positivistic approach.
- ✧ Husserl criticised it.
- ✧ How can science measure external world objectively? Bring in their own biases.

4. Solution: Philosophical alternative to social science

- ✧ Search for the essence of consciousness. The process to study events.
- ✧ Suspend your natural attitude. Come up with 'Pure Mind.'
- ✧ Suspend your own life world and understand the reality under study.
- ✧ No use of structured measuring instruments.
- ✧ Many limitations related to Husserl's doctrine.
- ✧ His ideas set a new line of thought which became the basis of modern phenomenology.

Topic 126: Alfred Schutz Introduction

As a philosophical concept **phenomenology** can be traced back to the pioneering work of Immanuel Kant and the long-term philosophical problem of how our knowledge of the world is based on our limited perceptions of it as these are filtered through the implicit schemas already in our minds. In a general sense we understand that our perceptions do not necessarily correspond precisely to the way the world **really** is. In everyday life, we unconsciously make allowances for the fact that the sounds and sights that register on our ears and eyes will vary according to our distance from their source. Kant's position was that in the final analysis it is impossible to know the world as it really is, in itself. Instead, all we can know is based on our **perceptions** of the world as they are filtered through our senses and organized through our particular cognitive frameworks. As applied to sociology this perspective reflects the notion that the way we see and interpret the world is based largely on the formative influence of our social environment. The cultural world into which we are born provides not only the language we use to communicate but also the perceptual categories and cognitive and interpretive frameworks through which we actually perceive and make sense of our world. At the micro level children learn early in life from their parents and other adults how to name and respond to the various objects they encounter in their environment. American children, for example, may have a pet **dog** while German children would

have a **hund**, but both would learn the appropriate name, and both would learn to distinguish their pet from similar but larger and more dangerous animals called **wolves** (in English) that they might see at a zoo.

The way we see the world will reflect not only the cognitive and interpretive framework of the overall culture but also the specific subcultural influences associated with our particular racial or ethnic identity group, gender, social class, and so on. Thus, for example, the implicit, common-sense knowledge that African Americans may have about police officers in their community will differ from the knowledge that whites have, reflecting differences in their experiences and their interpretive frameworks. (Police officers will have their own distinct perspectives too.) Similarly, women and men experience the world differently, and so might be expected to differ in how they would interpret the same event. The consciousness of each individual person will vary from that of anyone else, despite similarities in personal characteristics or social background.

The relationship between an individual's unique consciousness and the "intersubjective" or shared consciousness that develops among people who share the same social world was explored in detail by Alfred Schutz. Alfred Schutz was born in Germany in 1899 but came to the United States in 1939 (as did many other intellectuals as the Nazis acquired political power), where he taught at the New School for Social Research. Schutz was influenced by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, whose work dealt primarily with subjective consciousness at the individual level. Schutz borrowed extensively from Husserl in analyzing the complex relations between the stream of consciousness that accompanies our ongoing lived experience and the way subjective meanings are established through reflection and interaction.

Topic 127: Alfred Schutz Personal vs. intersubjective consciousness

In *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (1967), Schutz's point of departure was a critique of Max Weber's analysis of social action. He noted that establishing the subjective meaning of an individual's action is not as simple as Weber had suggested. This is because it is impossible for anyone (even a sociologist) to enter someone else's stream of consciousness and have an identical subjective experience, even when the other person is well known to the observer and the action is being observed as it actually takes place. Even when the other person's behavior is accompanied by observable facial indicators of subjective states (joy, satisfaction, frustration, anger, sadness, and so on), this information would be perceived through the observer's own perceptual and cognitive framework. Thus the observer's experience could not be identical with that of the person being observed. The difficulties are even greater if the observer is limited (as sociologists often are) to observing the effects of the action, or hearing an account thereof, after it has taken place, as opposed to observing it as it actually occurs.

Schutz pointed out that Weber did not indicate whether the subjective meaning applies during the time that an action is taking place or after it has been completed. These are not necessarily identical. Moreover, unless one's current behavior is part of some intentional project, it may not necessarily have a specific subjective meaning. Routine activities are sometimes performed in a nonreflexive or absent-minded way that do not necessarily register in a person's subjective consciousness or reflect any particular meaning. The subjective stream of consciousness that accompanies lived experience is often in a state of flux and not directly related to the activity in

which an individual is currently involved. People's minds wander as they perform routine activities, or they may focus on some past experience or future project that is not directly related to their current activities. This does not mean that current activities are meaningless. But the meaning may be implicit and not part of an individual's conscious awareness at the moment. In driving a car, for example, people's conscious attention may be focused more on their conversation with their fellow-passenger or what they plan to do when they arrive at their destination than on the routines involved in operating their vehicle.

To identify the subjective meaning of a particular action is likely to involve a break in the stream of consciousness as we reflect and interpret it in an appropriate frame of reference. Moreover, the meaning that is given may vary, depending on the frame of reference being used, and this may be influenced by the audience being addressed. For example, a popular rock musician on tour may describe a performance as "another stop on the road," "doing a gig," "making music," "making money," "demonstrating artistic creativity," "giving the audience what they want," "spending too much time away from home," or in various other ways. The unspoken meanings implied by these different explanations are quite different, even though they all apply to the same action. Similarly, reading a textbook may be defined as expanding one's knowledge or fulfilling course requirements.

Schutz's argument that attribution of meaning is a reflective process after an action takes place does not mean that the anticipated meaning of some goal-directed action cannot be defined in advance. However, the ultimate meaning in this case is not the action itself but the goal that will have been accomplished. Achieving this goal may then turn out to be the means for some other project in a longer time frame. Actions may thus have multiple meanings, some of which may be linked sequentially. For example, a student studies for an exam in the hope of learning the material plus getting a good grade, but the good grade is an intermediate goal that serves as the means for the longer range goal of earning a degree. This, in turn, may be the means for an even more distant goal, such as getting into graduate school or starting a career. Although individuals certainly reflect on the long-range significance or meaning of their various activities and projects from time to time, such reflection involves a break in the ever-changing stream of conscious experiences that accompany their actual behavior.

The temporal dimension is important not only because of the way our self-concepts develop and change through time but also because our experiences and conscious attention undergo continuous change over time. The vividness of present experiences gradually fade into memory. Detailed memories of recent experiences gradually displace older, less detailed ones. At the same time past experiences may subsequently be reinterpreted in the light of new experiences. Thus our mistakes and disappointments may later be reinterpreted as valuable lessons that helped develop our present character. Even when the results of experiences from the distant past are forgotten, they nevertheless leave sedimentary traces that contribute to our becoming the unique individuals that we are. This ongoing flow of subjective experiences that make up our current stream of consciousness can be seen as continuum that can be traced back to the very beginning of our conscious life.

When we recognize the uniqueness of each individual's background experiences and the specific trajectory of his or her life course as reflected in character and memory, we can appreciate why it

is quite impossible for anyone to enter the stream of consciousness of another person or to have exactly the same subjective experience. People's subjective understanding of one another is always limited, despite the high level of empathy they may have or how close they may feel to one another, because the background experiences that color their interpretations of the present are unique. Even so, people nevertheless manage to achieve sufficient level of mutual understanding that they can adjust to one another's actions, cooperate and communicate with one another, share emotional experiences, and even gain limited insights into some aspects of one another's subjective thoughts and feelings. Through common experiences, shared "stocks of knowledge" are developed that enable people to reach a certain level of mutual understanding. A critically important component of this implicitly shared knowledge is the language we use in communicating our subjective thoughts, feelings, intentions, and experiences—as emphasized in symbolic interaction theory. This process contributes to the accumulation of shared, or intersubjective, "stocks of knowledge" that are eventually taken for granted without additional discussion. In seeking to understand one another's subjective meanings, we typically make the assumption that other people's subjective experiences are probably similar to what ours would be in similar circumstances. This would apply even in the absence of communication and would include others who do not even share the same language. Thus, for example, when we observe television news stories that portray grieving parents in another country whose loved ones have been killed as a result of war or terrorism, we are able to understand and sympathize, despite the fact that our stream of consciousness as we hear and watch the news cannot be identical to the stream of consciousness of those who just received the bad news and are overcome with grief.

Lesson 34**Interactionism-II (Topic 128-131)****Topic 128: Alfred Schutz Meaning, Motive, and Accounts**

The concept of **motive** is often used, both in everyday life and in sociological analysis, to try to grasp the subjective meaning of another person's action. Schutz distinguished between two clearly different meanings of this concept: the "in order to" motive and the "because" motive. The "in order to" motive is future-oriented and involves explaining an action in terms of the goal or project for which it is being undertaken. In contrast, the "because" motive involves looking to the past to identify background experiences that contributed to the development of the action being analyzed. As Schutz put it, "The difference... between the two kinds of motive.... is that the in-order-to motive explains the act in terms of the project, while the genuine because-motive explains the project in terms of the actor's past experiences." (Schutz, 1967:91) His example is a murder explanation—a common challenge in criminology and in actual crime investigations. An explanation using an "in-order-to" motive might be that the goal was to get the victim's money and then prevent the victim from contacting the police, while an explanation of the "because" type of motive might focus on the criminal's poverty, the prior influence of criminal companions, or inadequate socialization due to parental neglect. However, the murderer's conscious awareness at the time may have been focused on not getting caught while getting the money, as opposed to any consideration of background "because" influences. Subsequently, the action may be interpreted by the individual or by others in the light of earlier experiences which are seen after the act as a "because" explanation. If the alleged murderer subsequently makes reference to poverty, criminal peers, or other background factors in an effort to rationalize the murder, others are likely to be skeptical and to see this as an effort to shift blame when caught and questioned. With regard to the in-order-to motive, questions can be raised as to whether the murderer intended from the beginning to kill the victim, decided to do so on the spur of the moment to silence the victim, or did so accidentally when the robbery did not go as planned or the victim fought back. Such questions beg for additional analysis in providing an adequate account. For some actions these two types of motives may seem more closely related than in the case of the two different explanations of murder. For example, a student studies hard **in order to** earn a high grade for the course. But the time and effort spent in preparing for the test may have resulted **because** the instructor indicated the test would be difficult and urged the students to study diligently. To push the explanation even further, the student may be committed to earning the highest grade possible **in order to** get into graduate school or qualify for a competitive scholarship. But these ambitious goals may also be explained **because** of his or her parents' strong emphasis on educational achievement or the student's own past experience in being rewarded for academic accomplishment. Both types of explanations could be offered, depending on the context. Such explanations may be incorporated in the **accounts** people are sometimes expected to provide of their own behavior. (The concept of accounts will be examined in more detail in connection with the ethnomethodological perspective.) At the same time observers (or social scientists) may be able to identify possible motives of which individuals are unaware.

The question of motivations and other aspects of subjective meaning are often of interest to other parties. In addition to trying to understand or account for our own behavior, people frequently make attributions regarding the motives of others, despite the difficulties involved in

understanding what goes on in anyone else's subjective consciousness. In addition to simple curiosity, we may have practical reasons for wanting to understand how to motivate people, perhaps because of an interest in influencing their behavior. In any case, whether the motivations we attribute are consistent with the conscious motivations of the person whose behavior we are trying to understand or predict is always an empirical question that may be difficult to answer.

Different people have varying (and sometimes conflicting) interests in explaining their own motives or the motives of others. In the case of an accused murderer brought to trial, for example, efforts to provide explanations (including both **in-order-to** and **because** motives) will likely differ for the individual accused, the arresting officer, the state's attorney, the defense attorney, the victim's family, and the alleged perpetrator's own family. All of these parties are likely to have definite opinions about the motives and the state of mind of the murderer, even though none of them actually witnessed the murder or could know exactly what the alleged perpetrator's state of mind was at the time. Even when an individual is being observed in the actual performance of an action, the observer's ability to understand the action is limited, since the observer's ongoing stream of consciousness while viewing the action will differ from that of the actor performing it.

Topic 129: Mutual understanding in personal vs. impersonal relations

Despite the difficulties in reaching mutual understanding, the language people use to attribute motives and other kinds of subjective experiences (intentions, feelings, goals, wishes) makes it possible to develop a common frame of reference through which a certain level of mutual understanding may be possible, even if limited and "through a glass darkly." But despite its opaque nature, people's ability to understand one another through the intersubjective consciousness they share is indeed sufficient for them to be able to influence one another (even though the influence sometimes turns out not to be exactly as intended), to make ongoing adjustments to one another's behavior, and sometimes even to glimpse at least part of what is going on in one another's minds.

Schutz (1967:163–172) identified the highest level of mutual understanding as a "thou" orientation. This occurs in face-to-face relationships when the parties involved intentionally seek to "tune in" and share one another's subjective thoughts and feelings. Such relationships are the type Cooley referred to as "primary group" relations. When people share this kind of mutual orientation, they form a "we-relationship" which can be contrasted with the less personal orientations involved in "they-relationships." In face-to-face relationships people are able to gain a level of mutual understanding of one another's subjective experiences that is much greater than in more impersonal relations. They can literally "read" one another's faces, which are highly expressive of their current subjective states, as well as communicate their thoughts and feelings—which, of course, may or may not always be consistent with their facial expressions. This face-reading process can occur in any kind of face-to-face encounter, but the details will be much more extensive in primary group relations as well as the background experiences that may help each party to account for the thoughts and feelings that they attribute to one another.

But even in the close encounter of a "we relationship," the ongoing subjective streams of consciousness of the parties involved will not be identical. When I experience myself speaking to you, I cannot have the same experience as you have in listening to me. Nevertheless, even though mutual understanding of one another's subjective experiences is always limited, it is greater in close personal relationships than in other types. However, when participants in a "we-relationship"

go their separate ways, their mutual awareness of one another's subjective experiences and states of consciousness is broken, and all that remains are the memories—until they meet again. Although their memories may overlap considerably, they will not be identical. If their subsequent communication are by telephone, letter, or e-mail, the immediacy of face-to-face encounters cannot be duplicated. And shared memories inevitably fade over time unless renewed by additional face-to-face contacts.

In contrast to “we-relationships” with mutual “thou” orientations, Schutz’s concept of “they-relationships” describes encounters in which individuals’ orientations toward one another are more limited or impersonal (Schutz, 1967:176–186). In such secondary relationships people may be in one another’s presence, read one another’s facial expressions, and actually influence one another, but they do not relate to one another as unique persons. Instead, they relate in terms of general roles associated with their positions in the social structure. Examples include the relation between a movie-goer and ticket taker, or a store clerk and customer, or a flight attendant and an airline passenger. These are extreme examples of impersonal relations with minimal levels of verbal communication. In between the extremes, relationships vary greatly in terms of how much individuals actually seek to understand one another as individual persons in their encounters with one another, or how much eye contact they regard as appropriate.

Moreover, relationships may change over time from “they-relationships” to “we-relationships” and then back again. For example, students and professors initially see one another in rather impersonal terms, but over the course of a semester personal relationships sometimes develop. Such relationships usually end when the course is over, and the students and the professor will thereafter see one another as “former professors” and “former students.” In a successful employment interview, however, the relationship may change during the course of the interview from an impersonal encounter to a relationship that both parties anticipate will probably be longer-lasting and perhaps somewhat more personal, though within limits. The same pattern of ebb and flow may also be seen in long-term relationships between couples who divorce, neighbors who move, attorneys and their clients, co-workers, ex-lovers, former “best friends” whose lives move in different directions, and casual acquaintances whose paths eventually diverge.

The detailed mutual understanding that develops in “we-relationships” is not generalizable to the larger social world. Despite the similarities in best friend, lover, and family relationships everywhere, people generally see their relationships with their own friends and families as distinctive and unique. In contrast, knowledge based on “they-relationships” is more general and more generalizable. For example, experiences with various professors or students, physicians or patients, social workers or clients, fellow members of one’s religious group, store clerks, airline flight attendants, and persons in other roles provide knowledge regarding how people in general will behave in such positions. However, detailed personal knowledge of the individuals performing these various roles is often lacking.

Topic 130: Contemporaries, procedures and successors

If we move beyond the range of our own personal experiences in both personal and impersonal encounters, a comprehensive description of the social world would also include all of our contemporaries throughout our society and beyond—plus our predecessors from previous

generations and our successors in future generations (Schutz, 1967:139–150; 207–214). All of these “others” are relevant for a phenomenological analysis because they are included in our subjective awareness of the social world as well as the intersubjective understanding we share with others.

Our knowledge of particular persons beyond our own social circle is likely to be based on reputation and thus limited to second-hand reports by people we know (whose information may also be second-hand) or by the news media. Or, we may be aware of many people we don’t know personally through their cultural products that become part of the public domain (movies, songs, books, articles), or in some cases we may view their television performances. Beyond the range of this indirect knowledge about particular individuals, our mental images of our contemporaries are limited to impersonal and anonymous “ideal types” whose roles are associated with the various positions that make up our society (Schutz, 1967:181–207). Thus, for example, we have a general awareness that individuals throughout the country are involved in performing roles in their local contexts as school teachers, parents, students, police officers, physicians, city officials, building contractors, bureaucratic administrators, bank officials, political leaders, babysitters, store clerks, newspaper and television reporters and editors, social workers and their clients—the list could go on and on. We may know in general terms what these various roles involve, and we often make various assumptions about the types of people who perform them, even though they are far beyond the range of our own personal experience.

The social world of our intersubjective awareness also includes a general awareness of past generations. Specific knowledge of the past varies greatly for different people. Many people have heard tales of late great grandparents or even earlier ancestors from their parents or grandparents or done their own “family tree” research. Probably most Americans also are aware of the historic roles played by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Elvis Presley, and Martin Luther King, for example. Beyond this, people can identify various historical ideal-type figures such as pilgrims, settlers, pioneers, inventors, writers, leaders of historic social movements, Civil War soldiers, former presidents, and so on. Many of our predecessors have left an enduring legacy of various works that they themselves produced, ranging from famous paintings such as the Mona Lisa to the plays of Shakespeare, the music of J. S. Bach, the writings of Thomas Jefferson, and the innumerable tools and other artifacts preserved in museums. All of these cultural products “carry” or symbolize objective meaning which at one level we can understand in our own subjective consciousness. With a vivid historical imagination we might even be able to imagine some aspects of the life experiences of past generations. Obviously, however, we cannot experience the subjective stream of consciousness of these historical figures as they were involved in the creation of the enduring cultural products we now observe. We may make inferences regarding their motivations, both “in-order-to” motives and “because” motives, but such inferences may or may not be “on target.” Highly knowledgeable historians may even disagree among themselves on such issues, even while admiring and appreciating their long-term significance.

In contrast to the world of our predecessors, which is now closed and unchangeable, and the world of our contemporaries, which is partially open and contingent on choices not yet made and circumstances not yet determined, the world of our successors is one about which our subjective understanding is obviously limited. We know in general terms that our generation and all our contemporaries will eventually be replaced by future generations, and we tend also to assume

that our successors will probably be like us in many ways, but no doubt different in other ways. Yet, the world of the future is open and unknown. Unlike the past, it is not yet determined, even though we may anticipate the continuation of present trends. But the unknown possibilities that lie beyond the range of our vision make the world of future generations appear to us as a realm of freedom and unrealized (and perhaps unlimited) potential—or otherwise (Schutz, 1967:214).

People vary greatly in terms of their conscious concerns for the needs of future generations and their sense of commitment to them. Political leaders promote policies that they claim will preserve and protect the environment or Social Security for future generations. But rhetorical references such as these are not the same as knowledge about the actual life experiences of future generations. Moreover, our concerns for the future are always constrained by the need to deal with the problems and challenges of the present. Although we know that the world of future generations will be affected by the legacy we leave, for good or for ill, our ability to predict the long-range impact of our own actions is limited.

Topic 131: Alfred Schutz Concluding remarks

A final important point from Schutz's (1967) phenomenological perspective has to do with the nature of sociological knowledge. Schutz recognized the limitations that sociologists, like all other people, face in achieving the in-depth understanding of other people's subjective consciousness that is possible in genuine "we-relationships" where participants share mutual "thou" orientations. This insight seems inconsistent with the optimistic expectations regarding the possibilities for deepening our sociological understanding through participant observation research leading to ethnographic "thick descriptions" of the ways of life among particular people in their local setting. This type of qualitative research is often promoted by symbolic interactionists as being able to provide in-depth insights that cannot be captured through the more impersonal strategy of survey research. Although ethnographic research may indeed reveal interesting details that might be missed in survey research, it is important to recognize that the understanding researchers may gain regarding social processes they observe and document is likely to differ from insiders' own collective self-understanding. In fact, insiders themselves may be expected to vary in terms of their understanding of themselves.

When sociologists are involved in a participant observation or ethnographic research project, their research interests and motivations may be expected to be quite different from those of the people they observe, and this will color the level and type of mutual understanding that they develop. At the same time, researchers cannot avoid observing and participating as fellow human beings, and thus their perceptions will reflect their own cognitive frameworks as shaped by their particular background. With survey research data that are not based on direct observation, the difficulties of inferring particular details of individuals' subjective consciousness or experiences are even greater. Since it is not possible to achieve complete in-depth understanding of other people's subjective consciousness, Schutz (1967:215–250) proposed that sociological knowledge should be based on the ideal-type form of understanding, as opposed to assuming that the details of the subjective consciousness of particular individuals can be accurately grasped. This strategy is, of course, consistent with Max Weber's "ideal-type" method, but Schutz went beyond Weber in explaining why this approach is necessary and appropriate for sociological analysis. Sociological knowledge for Schutz does **not** consist primarily in the details of a particular social situation or

the specific subjective experiences or meanings of the participants involved. Instead of “thick descriptions” of specific individuals, their relationships, and their unique social worlds, the goal of sociological research and analysis should be to identify patterns of action and relationships that can be associated with general social types.

The ideal-type method used by sociologists is not the same as the generalizations used in everyday life, since the ideal types identified by sociologists will reflect their own intellectual interests and theoretical frameworks. Some aspects of individuals’ subjective consciousness may indeed become relevant, particularly when expressed in an objective form that may influence others, but a particular sociologist’s focus on other people’s subjective consciousness will reflect his or her own distinctive interests and theoretical orientation. This means that the sociologist’s subjective interpretation of an individual’s action will by no means be the same as that individual’s own subjective interpretation. Moreover, sociologists with different theoretical orientations are likely to vary in their interpretations. Despite Schutz’s emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual’s subjective consciousness, his argument regarding the ideal-type nature of sociological knowledge is important for the accumulation of knowledge that can be generalized beyond the level of specific individuals and their unique subjective consciousness. At the same time, it recognizes that sociologists’ efforts to interpret people’s consciousness reflect their own particular interests and personal biases. The next perspective to be reviewed focuses even more on overt behavior than subjective consciousness as such.

Lesson 35**Symbolic interactionism-I (Topic 132-135)****Topic 132: Symbolic interactionism Background**

Interaction is a communication. People interact via symbols. Agree on the meaning of vocal, facial and physical gestures. Humans are the creators and users of symbols. Symbols are means of communication i.e. language. Language is composed of symbols: letters, sounds, and signs. People interpret the meanings of symbols. Subjective meanings that people impose on objects, events, ideas, and behaviors. Meanings may be socially constructed. Meanings of race, gender, status, long hair kept by men, color, thumbs up, smoking, hand shake. Some agreement on meanings.

On the basis of interpretation of meanings a person decides:

With whom to interact?

How to act and interact?

Meanings of the words spoken is a means of one's actions.

Communication – exchange of meaning through language and symbols.

Concept of symbolic interactionism was given H. Blumer.

Cornerstone of symbolic interactionism is a common set of symbols and its understanding.

Assumption: The key elements in children's milieu are the symbols and their understandings that guide the individuals around them.

Primary focuses are:

On individual "with a self" and

On the interaction between a person's internal thoughts and emotions and his/her social behavior.

Analysis is of small-scale interpersonal relationships.

Individuals are viewed as active constructors of their own conduct who:

Interpret, evaluate, define, and map out their own action.

Not passive beings who are impinged upon by other forces.

Stresses on the processes by which the individuals make decisions and form opinions. Micro analysis.

Topic 133: Georg Simmel Primary concerns

Georg Simmel is best known as a microsociologist who played a significant role in the development of small-group research (Caplow, 1968), symbolic interactionism, and exchange theory. All of Simmel's contributions in these areas reflect his belief that sociologists should study primarily forms and types of social interaction. Robert Nisbet presents this view of Simmel's contribution to sociology: It is the *microsociological* character of Simmel's work that may always give him an edge in timeliness over the other pioneers. He did not disdain the small and the intimate

elements of human association, nor did he ever lose sight of the primacy of human beings, of concrete individuals, in his analysis of institutions. (Nisbet, 1959:480) David Frisby makes a similar point: “The grounding of sociology in some psychological categories may be one reason why Simmel’s sociology has proved attractive not merely to the interactionist but also to social psychology” (1984:57; see also Frisby, 1992:20–41). However, it is often forgotten that Simmel’s microsociological work on the forms of interaction is embedded in a broader theory of the relations between individuals and the larger society.

Topic 134: Levels and areas of concerns

Simmel had a much more complicated and sophisticated theory of social reality than he commonly is given credit for in contemporary American sociology. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (1978) argue that there are four basic levels of concern in Simmel’s work. First are his microscopic assumptions about the psychological components of social life. Second, on a slightly larger scale, is his interest in the sociological components of interpersonal relationships. Third, and most macroscopic, is his work on the structure of, and changes in, the social and cultural “spirit” of his times. Not only did Simmel operate with this image of a three-tiered social reality, he adopted the principle of *emergence* (Sawyer, 2005), the idea that the higher levels emerge out of the lower levels: “Further development replaces the immediacy of interacting forces with the creation of higher supra-individual formations, which appear as independent representatives of these forces and absorb and mediate the relations between individuals” (1907/1978:174). He also said, “If society is to be an autonomous object of an independent science, then it can only be so through the fact that, out of the sum of the individual elements that constitute it, a new entity emerges; otherwise all problems of social science would only be those of individual psychology” (Simmel, cited in Frisby, 1984:56–57). Overarching these three tiers is a fourth that involves ultimate metaphysical principles of life. These eternal truths affect all of Simmel’s work and, as we will see, lead to his image of the future direction of the world.

This concern with multiple levels of social reality is reflected in Simmel’s definition of three separable problem “areas” in sociology in “The Problem Areas of Sociology” (1917/1950). The first he described as “pure” sociology. In this area, psychological variables are combined with forms of interactions. Although Simmel clearly assumed that actors have creative mental abilities, he gave little explicit attention to this aspect of social reality. His most microscopic work is with the *forms* that interaction takes as well as with the *types* of people who engage in interaction (Korllos, 1994). The forms include subordination, superordination, exchange, conflict, and sociability. In his work on types, he differentiated between positions in the interactional structure, such as “competitor” and “coquette,” and orientations to the world, such as “miser,” “spendthrift,” “stranger,” and “adventurer.” At the intermediate level is Simmel’s “general” sociology, dealing with the social and cultural products of human history. Here Simmel manifested his larger-scale interests in the group, the structure and history of societies and cultures. Finally, in Simmel’s “philosophical” sociology, he dealt with his views on the basic nature, and inevitable fate, of humankind. Throughout this chapter, we will touch on all these levels and sociologies. We will find that although Simmel sometimes separated the different levels and sociologies, he more often integrated them into a broader totality.

Topic 135: Dialectical thinking

Simmel's way of dealing with the interrelationships among three basic levels of social reality (leaving out his fourth, metaphysical, level) gave his sociology a dialectical character reminiscent of Marx's sociology (D. Levine, 1991b:109). A dialectical approach, as we saw earlier, is multicausal and multidirectional, integrates fact and value, rejects the idea that there are hard-and-fast dividing lines between social phenomena, focuses on social relations (B. Turner, 1986), looks not only at the present but also at the past and the future, and is deeply concerned with both conflicts and contradictions. In spite of the similarities between Marx and Simmel in their use of a dialectical approach, there are important differences between them. Of greatest importance is the fact that they focused on very different aspects of the social world and offered very different images of the future of the world. Instead of Marx's revolutionary optimism, Simmel had a view of the future closer to Weber's image of an "iron cage" from which there is no escape.

Simmel manifested his commitment to the dialectic in various ways (Featherstone, 1991:7). For one thing, Simmel's sociology was always concerned with relationships (Lichtblau and Ritter, 1991), especially interaction (association). More generally, Simmel was a "methodological relationist" (Ritzer and Gindoff, 1992) operating with the "principle that everything interacts in some way with everything else" (Simmel, cited in Frisby, 1992:9). Overall he was ever attuned to dualisms, conflicts, and contradictions in whatever realm of the social world he happened to be working on (Sellerberg, 1994). Donald Levine states that this perspective reflects Simmel's belief that " the world can best be understood in terms of conflicts and contrasts between opposed categories " (1971:xxxv). Rather than try to deal with this mode of thinking throughout Simmel's work, I will illustrate it from his work on one of his forms of interaction—fashion. Simmel used a similar mode of dialectical thinking in most of his essays on social forms and social types, but this discussion of fashion amply illustrates his method of dealing with these phenomena. I will also deal with the dialectic in Simmel's thoughts on subjective-objective culture and the concepts of "more-life" and "more-than-life."

Lesson 36**Symbolic interactionism-I (Topic 136-139)****Topic 136-137: Social interaction**

Georg Simmel is best known in contemporary sociology for his contributions to our understanding of the patterns, or forms, of social interaction. He expressed his interest in this level of social reality in this way:

We are dealing here with microscopic-molecular processes within human material, so to speak. These processes are the actual occurrences that are concatenated or hypostatized into those macrocosmic, solid units and systems. That people look at one another and are jealous of one another; that they exchange letters or have dinner together; that apart from all tangible interests they strike one another as pleasant or unpleasant; that gratitude for altruistic acts makes for inseparable union; that one asks another to point out a certain street; that people dress and adorn themselves for each other—these are a few casually chosen illustrations from the whole range of relations that play between one person and another. They may be momentary or permanent, conscious or unconscious, ephemeral or of grave consequence, but they incessantly tie men together. At each moment such threads are spun, dropped, taken up again, displaced by others, interwoven with others. These interactions among the atoms of society are accessible only to psychological microscopy. (Simmel, 1908/1959b:327–328)

Simmel made clear here that one of his primary interests was interaction (association) among conscious actors and that his intent was to look at a wide range of interactions that may seem trivial at some times but crucially important at others. His was not a Durkheimian expression of interest in social facts but a declaration of a smaller-scale focus for sociology.

Because Simmel sometimes took an exaggerated position on the importance of interaction in his sociology, many have lost sight of his insights into the larger-scale aspects of social reality. At times, for example, he equated society with interaction: “Society . . . is only the synthesis or the general term for the totality of these specific interactions. . . . ‘Society’ is identical with the sum total of these relations” (Simmel, 1907/1978:175). Such statements may be taken as a reaffirmation of his interest in interaction, but as we will see, in his general and philosophical sociologies, Simmel held a much larger-scale conception of society as well as culture.

Interaction: Forms and Types

One of Simmel’s dominant concerns was the *form* rather than the *content* of social interaction. This concern stemmed from Simmel’s identification with the Kantian tradition in philosophy, in which much is made of the difference between form and content. Simmel’s position here, however, was quite simple. From Simmel’s point of view, the real world is composed of innumerable events, actions, interactions, and so forth. To cope with this maze of reality (the “contents”), people order it by imposing patterns, or forms, on it. Thus, instead of a bewildering array of specific events, the actor is confronted with a limited number of forms. In Simmel’s view, the sociologist’s task is to

do precisely what the layperson does, that is, impose a limited number of forms on social reality, on interaction in particular, so that it may be better analyzed.

This methodology generally involves extracting commonalities that are found in a wide array of specific interactions. For example, the superordination and subordination forms of interaction are found in a wide range of settings, “in the state as well as in a religious community, in a band of conspirators as in an economic association, in art school as in a family” (Simmel, 1908/1959b:317). Donald Levine, one of Simmel’s foremost contemporary analysts, describes Simmel’s method of doing formal interactional sociology in this way: “His method is to select some bounded, finite phenomenon from the world of flux; to examine the multiplicity of elements which compose it; and to ascertain the cause of their coherence by disclosing its form. Secondly, he investigates the origins of this form and its structural implications” (1971:xxxi). More specifically, Levine points out that “forms are the patterns exhibited by the associations” of people (1981b:65).

Simmel’s interest in the forms of social interaction has been subjected to various criticisms. For example, he has been accused of imposing order where there is none and of producing a series of unrelated studies that in the end really impose no better order on the complexities of social reality than does the layperson. Some of these criticisms are valid only if we focus on Simmel’s concern with forms of interaction, his formal sociology, and ignore the other types of sociology he practiced. However, there are a number of ways to defend Simmel’s approach to formal sociology. First, it is close to reality, as reflected by the innumerable real-life examples employed by Simmel. Second, it does not impose arbitrary and rigid categories on social reality but tries instead to allow the forms to flow from social reality. Third, Simmel’s approach does not employ a general theoretical schema into which all aspects of the social world are forced. He thus avoided the reification of a theoretical schema that plagues a theorist like Talcott Parsons. Finally, formal sociology militates against the poorly conceptualized empiricism that is characteristic of much of sociology.

Simmel certainly used empirical “data,” but they are subordinated to his effort to impose some order on the bewildering world of social reality.

Social Geometry

In Simmel’s formal sociology, one sees most clearly his effort to develop a “geometry” of social relations. Two of the geometric coefficients that interested him are numbers and distance (others are position, valence, self-involvement, and symmetry [Levine, 1981b]).

Numbers Simmel’s interest in the impact of numbers of people on the quality of interaction can be seen in his discussion of the difference between a dyad and a triad.

Dyad and Triad. For Simmel (1950) there was a crucial difference between the *dyad* (two-person group) and the *triad* (three-person group). The addition of a third person causes a radical and fundamental change. Increasing the membership beyond three has nowhere near the same impact as does adding a third member. Unlike all other groups, the dyad does not achieve a meaning beyond the two individuals involved. There is no independent group structure in a dyad; there is nothing more to the group than the two separable individuals. Thus, each member of a dyad retains

a high level of individuality. The individual is not lowered to the level of the group. This is not the case in a triad. A triad does have the possibility of obtaining a meaning beyond the individuals involved. There is likely to be more to a triad than the individuals involved. It is likely to develop an independent group structure. As a result, there is a greater threat to the individuality of the members. A triad can have a general leveling effect on the members.

With the addition of a third party to the group, a number of new social roles become possible. For example, the third party can take the role of arbitrator or mediator in disputes within the group. Then the third party can use disputes between the other two for his or her own gain or become an object of competition between the other two parties. The third member also can intentionally foster conflict between the other two parties in order to gain superiority (divide and rule). A stratification system and an authority structure then can emerge. The movement from dyad to triad is essential to the development of social structures that can become separate from, and dominant over, individuals. Such a possibility does not exist in a dyad.

The process that is begun in the transition from a dyad to a triad continues as larger and larger groups and, ultimately, societies emerge. In these large social structures, the individual, increasingly separated from the structure of society, grows more and more alone, isolated, and segmented. This results finally in a dialectical relationship between individuals and social structures: “According to Simmel, the socialized individual always remains in a dual relation toward society: he is incorporated within it and yet stands against it. . . . The individual is determined, yet determining; acted upon, yet self-actuating” (Coser, 1965:11). The contradiction here is that “society allows the emergence of individuality and autonomy, but it also impedes it” (Coser, 1965:11).

Group Size. At a more general level, there is Simmel’s (1908/1971a) ambivalent attitude toward the impact of group size. On the one hand, he took the position that the increase in the size of a group or society increases individual freedom. A small group or society is likely to control the individual completely. However, in a larger society, the individual is likely to be involved in a number of groups, each of which controls only a small portion of his or her total personality. In other words, “*Individuality in being and action generally increases to the degree that the social circle encompassing the individual expands*” (Simmel, 1908/1971a:252). However, Simmel took the view that large societies create a set of problems that ultimately threaten individual freedom. For example, he saw the masses as likely to be dominated by one idea, the simplest idea. The physical proximity of a mass makes people suggestible and more likely to follow simplistic ideas, to engage in mindless, emotional actions.

Perhaps most important, in terms of Simmel’s interest in forms of interaction, is that increasing size and differentiation tend to loosen the bonds between individuals and leave in their place much more distant, impersonal, and segmental relationships. Paradoxically, the large group that frees the individual simultaneously threatens that individuality. Also paradoxical is Simmel’s belief that one way for individuals to cope with the threat of the mass society is to immerse themselves in small groups such as the family.

Distance Another of Simmel’s concerns in social geometry was *distance*. Levine offers a good summation of Simmel’s views on the role of distance in social relationships: “*The properties of*

forms and the meanings of things are a function of the relative distances between individuals and other individuals or things” (1971:xxxiv). This concern with distance is manifest in various places in Simmel’s work. We will discuss it in two different contexts—in Simmel’s massive *The Philosophy of Money* and in one of his cleverest essays, “The Stranger.” In *The Philosophy of Money* (1907/1978), Simmel enunciated some general principles about value—and about what makes things valuable—that served as the basis for his analysis of money. The essential point is that the value of something is determined by its distance from the actor. It is not valuable if it is either too close and too easy to obtain or too distant and too difficult to obtain. Objects that are attainable, but only with great effort, are the most valuable. Distance also plays a central role in Simmel’s “The Stranger” (1908/1971b; McVeigh and Sikkink, 2005; Tabboni, 1995), an essay on a type of actor who is neither too close nor too far. If he (or she) were too close, he would no longer be a stranger, but if he were too far, he would cease to have any contact with the group.

The interaction that the stranger engages in with the group members involves a combination of closeness and distance. The peculiar distance of the stranger from the group allows him to have a series of unusual interaction patterns with the members. For example, the stranger can be more objective in his relationships with the group members. Because he is a stranger, other group members feel more comfortable expressing confidences to him. In these and other ways, a pattern of coordination and consistent interaction emerges between the stranger and the other group members. The stranger becomes an organic member of the group. But Simmel not only considered the stranger a social type, he considered strangeness a form of social interaction. A degree of strangeness, involving a combination of nearness and remoteness, enters into all social relationships, even the most intimate. Thus we can examine a wide range of specific interactions in order to discover the degree of strangeness found in each. Although geometric dimensions enter a number of Simmel’s types and forms, there is much more to them than simply geometry. The types and forms are constructs that Simmel used to gain a greater understanding of a wide range of interaction patterns.

Social Types

We have already encountered one of Simmel’s types, the stranger; others include the miser, the spendthrift, the adventurer, and the nobleman. To illustrate his mode of thinking in this area, we will focus on one of his types, the poor.

The Poor As is typical of types in Simmel’s work, the *poor* were defined in terms of social relationships, as being aided by other people or at least having the right to that aid. Here Simmel quite clearly did not hold the view that *poverty* is defined by a quantity, or rather a lack of quantity, of money.

Although Simmel focused on the poor in terms of characteristic relationships and interaction patterns, he also used the occasion of his essay “The Poor” (1908/1971c) to develop a wide range of interesting insights into the poor and poverty. It was characteristic of Simmel to offer a profusion of insights in every essay. Indeed, this is one of his great claims to fame. For example, Simmel argued that a reciprocal set of rights and obligations defines the relationship between the needy and the givers. The needy have the right to receive aid, and this right makes receiving aid less painful. Conversely, the giver has the obligation to give to the needy. Simmel also took the

functionalist position that aid to the poor by society helps support the system. Society requires aid to the poor “so that the poor will not become active and dangerous enemies of society, so as to make their reduced energies more productive, and so as to prevent the degeneration of their progeny” (Simmel, 1908/1971c:154). Thus, aid to the poor is for the sake of society, not so much for the poor per se. The state plays a key role here, and, as Simmel saw it, the treatment of the poor grows increasingly impersonal as the mechanism for giving aid becomes more bureaucratized.

Simmel also had a relativistic view of poverty; that is, the poor are not simply those who stand at the bottom of society. From his point of view, poverty is found in *all* social strata. This concept foreshadowed the later sociological concept of *relative deprivation*. If people who are members of the upper classes have less than their peers do, they are likely to feel poor in comparison to them. Therefore, government programs aimed at eradicating poverty can never succeed. Even if those at the bottom are elevated, many people throughout the stratification system will still feel poor in comparison to their peers.

Social Forms

As with social types, Simmel looked at a wide range of social forms, including exchange, conflict, prostitution, and sociability. We can illustrate Simmel’s (1908/1971d) work on social forms through his discussion of domination, that is, superordination and subordination.

Superordination and Subordination

Superordination and subordination have a reciprocal relationship. The leader does not want to determine completely the thoughts and actions of others. Rather, the leader expects the subordinate to react either positively or negatively. Neither this nor any other form of interaction can exist without mutual relationships. Even in the most oppressive form of domination, subordinates have at least some degree of personal freedom.

To most people, superordination involves an effort to eliminate completely the independence of subordinates, but Simmel argued that a social relationship would cease to exist if this were the case. Simmel asserted that one can be subordinated to an individual, a group, or an objective force. Leadership by a single individual generally leads to a tightly knit group either in support of or in opposition to the leader. Even when opposition arises in such a group, discord can be resolved more easily when the parties stand under the same higher power. Subordination under a plurality can have very uneven effects. On the one hand, the objectivity of rule by a plurality may make for greater unity in the group than does the more arbitrary rule of an individual. On the other hand, hostility is likely to be engendered among subordinates if they do not get the personal attention of a leader. Simmel found subordination under an objective principle to be most offensive, perhaps because human relationships and social interactions are eliminated. People feel they are determined by an impersonal law that they have no ability to affect. Simmel saw subordination to an individual as freer and more spontaneous: “Subordination under a person has an element of freedom and dignity in comparison with which all obedience to laws has something mechanical and passive” (1908/1971d:115). Even worse is subordination to objects (for example, icons), which Simmel found a “humiliatingly harsh and unconditional kind of subordination” (1908/1971d:115). Because the individual is dominated by a thing, “he himself psychologically sinks to the category of mere thing” (Simmel, 1908/1971d:117).

Topic 138: Social structures

Simmel said relatively little directly about the large-scale structures of society. In fact, at times, given his focus on patterns of interaction, he denied the existence of that level of social reality. A good example of this is found in his effort to define *society*, where he rejected the realist position exemplified by Emile Durkheim that society is a real, material entity. Lewis Coser notes, “He did not see society as a thing or an organism” (1965:5). Simmel was also uncomfortable with the nominalist conception that society is nothing more than a collection of isolated individuals. He adopted an intermediate position, conceiving of society as a set of interactions (Spykman, 1925/1966:88). “*Society* is merely the name for a number of individuals connected by ‘interaction’ ” (Simmel, cited in Coser, 1965:5).

Although Simmel enunciated this interactionist position, in much of his work he operated as a realist, as if society were a real material structure. There is, then, a basic contradiction in Simmel’s work on the social-structural level. Simmel noted, “Society transcends the individual and lives its own life which follows its own laws. It, too, confronts the individual with a historical, imperative firmness” (1908/1950a:258). Coser catches the essence of this aspect of Simmel’s thought: “The larger superindividual structures—the state, the clan, the family, the city, or the trade union—turn out to be but crystallizations of this interaction, even though they may attain autonomy and permanency and confront the individual as if they were alien powers” (1965:5). Rudolph Heberle makes essentially the same point: “One can scarcely escape the impression that Simmel views society as an interplay of structural factors, in which the human beings appear as passive objects rather than as live and willing actors” (1965:117).

The resolution of this paradox lies in the difference between Simmel’s formal sociology, in which he tended to adhere to an interactionist view of society, and his historical and philosophical sociologies, in which he was much more inclined to see society as an independent, coercive social structure. In the latter sociologies, he saw society as part of the broader process of the development of objective culture, which worried him. Although objective culture is best seen as part of the cultural realm, Simmel included the growth of large-scale social structures as part of this process. That Simmel related the growth of social structures to the spread of objective culture is clear in this statement: “The increasing objectification of our culture, whose phenomena consist more and more of impersonal elements and less and less absorb the subjective totality of the individual . . . also involves sociological structures” (1908/1950b:318). In addition to clarifying the relationship between society and objective culture, this statement leads to Simmel’s thoughts on the cultural level of social reality.

Topic 139: Objective culture

One of the main focuses of Simmel’s historical and philosophical sociology is the cultural level of social reality, or what he called the “objective culture.” In Simmel’s view, people produce culture, but because of their ability to reify social reality, the cultural world and the social world come to have lives of their own, lives that come increasingly to dominate the actors who created, and daily re-create, them. “The cultural objects become more and more linked to each other in a self-

contained world which has increasingly fewer contacts with the [individual] subjective psyche and its desires and sensibilities” (Coser, 1965:22). Although people always retain the capacity to create and re-create culture, the long-term trend of history is for culture to exert a more and more coercive force on the actor.

The preponderance of objective over [individual] subjective culture that developed during the nineteenth century . . . this discrepancy seems to widen steadily. Every day and from all sides, the wealth of objective culture increases, but the individual mind can enrich the forms and content of its own development only by distancing itself still further from that culture and developing its own at a much slower pace. (Simmel, 1907/1978:449)

In various places in his work, Simmel identified a number of components of the objective culture, for example, tools, means of transport, products of science, technology, arts, language, the intellectual sphere, conventional wisdom, religious dogma, philosophical systems, legal systems, moral codes, and ideals (for example, the “fatherland”). The objective culture grows and expands in various ways. First, its absolute size grows with increasing modernization. This can be seen most obviously in the case of scientific knowledge, which is expanding exponentially, although this is just as true of most other aspects of the cultural realm. Second, the number of different components of the cultural realm also grows. Finally, and perhaps most important, the various elements of the cultural world become more and more intertwined in an ever more powerful, self-contained world that is increasingly beyond the control of the actors (Oakes, 1984:12). Simmel not only was interested in describing the growth of objective culture but also was greatly disturbed by it: “Simmel was impressed—if not depressed—by the bewildering number and variety of human products which in the contemporary world surround and unceasingly impinge upon the individual” (Weingartner, 1959:33).

What worried Simmel most was the threat to individual culture posed by the growth of objective culture. Simmel’s personal sympathies were with a world dominated by individual culture, but he saw the possibility of such a world as more and more unlikely. It is this that Simmel described as the “tragedy of culture.” (I will comment on this in detail in the discussion of *The Philosophy of Money*.) Simmel’s specific analysis of the growth of objective culture over individual subjective culture is simply one example of a general principle that dominates all of life: “The total value of something increases to the same extent as the value of its individual parts declines” (1907/1978:199).

We can relate Simmel’s general argument about objective culture to his more basic analysis of forms of interaction. In one of his best-known essays, “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903/1971), Simmel analyzed the forms of interaction that take place in the modern city (Vidler, 1991). He saw the modern metropolis as the “genuine arena” of the growth of objective culture and the decline of individual culture. It is the scene of the predominance of the money economy, and money, as Simmel often made clear, has a profound effect on the nature of human relationships. The widespread use of money leads to an emphasis on calculability and rationality in all spheres of life. Thus genuine human relationships decline, and social relationships tend to be dominated by a blasé and reserved attitude. Whereas the small town was characterized by greater feeling and emotionality, the modern city is characterized by a shallow intellectuality that matches

the calculability needed by a money economy. The city is also the center of the division of labor, and, as we have seen, specialization plays a central role in the production of an ever-expanding objective culture, with a corresponding decline in individual culture. The city is a “frightful leveler,” in which virtually everyone is reduced to emphasizing unfeeling calculability. It is more and more difficult to maintain individuality in the face of the expansion of objective culture (Lohmann and Wilkes, 1996).

It should be pointed out that in his essay on the city (as well as in many other places in his work) Simmel also discussed the liberating effect of this modern development. For example, he emphasized the fact that people are freer in the modern city than in the tight social confines of the small town. More is said about Simmel’s thoughts on the liberating impact of modernity at the close of the following section, devoted to Simmel’s book *The Philosophy of Money*.

First, it is necessary to indicate that one of the many ironies of Simmel’s influence on the development of sociology is that his micro-analytic work is used, but its broader implications are ignored almost totally. Take the example of Simmel’s work on exchange relationships. He saw exchange as the “purest and most developed kind” of interaction (Simmel, 1907/1978:82). Although all forms of interaction involve some sacrifice, it occurs most clearly in exchange relationships. Simmel thought of all social exchanges as involving “profit and loss.” Such an orientation was crucial to Simmel’s microsociological work and specifically to the development of his largely microoriented exchange theory. However, his thoughts on exchange are also expressed in his broader work on money. To Simmel, money is the purest form of exchange. In contrast to a barter economy, where the cycle ends when one object has been exchanged for another, an economy based on money allows for an endless series of exchanges. This possibility is crucial for Simmel because it provides the basis for the widespread development of social structures and objective culture. Consequently, money as a form of exchange represented for Simmel one of the root causes of the alienation of people in a modern reified social structure. In his treatment of the city and exchange, one can see the elegance of Simmel’s thinking as he related small-scale sociological forms of exchange to the development of modern society in its totality. Although this link can be found in his specific essays (especially Simmel, 1991), it is clearest in *The Philosophy of Money*.

Lesson 37**Charles H. Cooley (Topic140-144)****Topic 140: Charles H. Cooley Introduction**

Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929) was born in Michigan and was associated with the University of Michigan for all of his professional life. Like Mead, his ideas also contributed to the development of symbolic interaction theory. His perspective on the relation between a person's self-concept and face-to-face interaction within primary groups is expressed in his frequently cited concept of the “looking glass self” (Cooley ([1902] 1964). This metaphor refers to the way one's identity is formed from the reflections one sees of oneself in the reactions of others. This concept is clearly parallel to Mead's insights regarding the social origins of one's self-concept. More than Mead, however, Cooley stressed the importance of our emotional reactions to these responses. When we perceive the reactions of others as indicating either approval or disapproval, we feel pride or shame as a result. Cooley ([1902] 1964) also pointed out that our identity may extend beyond ourselves to include our family, friends, and primary group relationships. To speak of “my family” or “my group” is to expand our sense of self to include these relationships. The groups with which we identify most strongly in this way are likely to be **primary groups**. Such groups differ from **secondary groups** in that they are characterized by intimate face-to-face relationships. It is through primary groups (especially the family) that individuals are bound together with a sense of unity and cohesiveness that finds expression in the mutual regard (or sympathy) they have for one another in their common life.

Topic 141: Interaction and society

For Cooley, society is an organic whole. Here social processes work to create, maintain, and change networks of reciprocal activity. Society is constructed from diverse social forms – from small groups to large-scale social institutions. For Cooley, society is an organic whole. Here social processes work to create, maintain, and change networks of reciprocal activity. Society is constructed from diverse social forms – from small groups to large-scale social institutions. Humans have the ability to assign common meanings and interpretations to their gestures. Communicate through gestures. Call it constructed gestural communication. Through communication they establish relations. Leads to interaction and organization. By reading gestures people are able to read each other's mind. Interpret each other's attitudes. Interaction leads to the development of self. Self becomes a critical link in the creation and maintenance of society. It all happens due to the patterns of reciprocal communication and interaction.

Topic 142-143: Looking glass self

For Cooley: Humans have the capacity for self-consciousness. Capacity emerges out of interaction in groups. Once it exists, it allows people to organize themselves into society. Self: Ability to see and recognize oneself as an object. Humans use the gestures of others to see themselves. The images people have of themselves are similar to reflections of others to one's behavior. By reading the gestures of others, humans see themselves as an object. We see our face, figure, and dress in the glass. We are interested in them because they are ours. Imagine how we appear to others.

Appearance includes everything about the actor including physical appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, and so on.

As people see themselves in the looking glass of other people's gestures, they:

- 1. Imagine their appearance in the eyes of others;
 - 2. Imagine the judgment of others;
 - 3. Have some self-feeling about themselves (pride, embarrassment, shame).
- During interaction people develop self-consciousness and self-feeling.
 - Through repeated glances in the looking glass, humans develop a stable-sense of self.
 - Looking glass is used as a metaphor. It is used as symbolically not literally.

Emergence of self

Self emerges over the life history of an individual. It is a process. Young infants may have limited ability to read the gestures. Initially they may be unable to see themselves as objects in the looking glass. With time, practice, biological maturation, and exposure to varieties of "others," children come to see themselves in the looking glass. Develop self-feeling and the resultant stable self-feeling. It is inevitable, provided one interacts with others. Over time an individual's personality is formed. Metaphorically, others represent a mirror. What we think of ourselves depends on what we think others think of us. So look at: Our perception of how we look to others. Our perception in their judgment of how we look.

Our feelings about these judgments. *Self-feelings, self concept, self image, self consciousness.* Over time an individual becomes conscious of self.

Cooley divided consciousness into three aspects:

- Self-consciousness: self-awareness of, feelings about oneself;
- Social consciousness: Person's perceptions of, and attitudes toward, other people; and
- Public consciousness: An individual's view of others as organized in a communicative group.

All three aspects are "phases of a single whole." It helps people to have a basis for stable action and cooperative interaction. Works as means to social control. Interaction is necessary for the emergence of self. During interaction people develop self-consciousness and self-feeling. Through repeated glances in the looking glass, humans develop a stable-sense of self.

Topic 144: Primary groups

Cooley considered "primary group" as the basic unit of society. Such groups are small. Relationships are:

Intimate;
Personal/face to face;
Durable; and

Cooperative.

Call these as primary relationships.

Groups are primary because:

- They are among the first groups we experience in life. Examples: Family and friendship groups.
- They are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of individuals.

Members belong together. There is personal orientation, not goal orientation which is part of secondary groups. There is fusion of individualities in the common whole, and the resultant common purpose of the group. Looking glass of gestures as reflected in the primary group are the most important in the emergence and maintenance of self-feeling. Self emerges by virtue of individual's participation in a face-to-face, organized activity.

Primary group provides a bridge between the individual and institutional structure of society. Because: Primary groups inculcate the traditions, morals, values, and other cultural aspects in the person through socialization. Self emerges by virtue of individual's participation in a face-to-face, organized activity.

Primary group provides a bridge between the individual and institutional structure of society. Because: Primary groups inculcate the traditions, morals, values, and other cultural aspects in the person through socialization.

Interaction is necessary for the emergence of self. During interaction people develop self-consciousness and self-feeling. Through repeated glances in the looking glass, humans develop a stable-sense of self.

Primary group is: An important agency of socialization; hence A link between the individual and institutional structures of society. Without this link social institutions cannot be maintained. For Cooley, primary groups “are the springs of life, not only for the individual but also for social institutions.” G. H. Mead further worked on this concept in his theory.

Lesson 38**George H. Mead-I (Topic 145-147)****Topic 145: George H. Mead: Introduction**

Of all the Chicago School theorists, George Herbert Mead was probably the most comprehensive and abstract. His contributions are important for analyzing the close relationship between social interaction and subjective mental processes, as well as the way individuals' self-concepts link them with the life of the larger community or society.² Mead's perspective on how knowledge develops through the process of adaptation to the environment and problem solving provides a bridge between pragmatism and sociology. Mead referred to his perspective as **social behaviorism**, but many of his ideas were later incorporated in symbolic interaction theory. Mead's focus on interaction was similar to Simmel's, but Mead stressed more explicitly the way interaction is linked with subjective interpretation (the thinking process).

Mead's (1934) social behaviorism was intended as a critique of psychological behaviorism, which he considered incomplete for understanding both the social and the subjective dimensions of human behavior. For Mead, the simple stimulus-response model of behavioral psychology ignored the subjective process of interpretation whereby the meanings of environmental stimuli are established through interaction. This does not mean that stimulus-response patterns do not apply to human beings. But the intentional responses of human beings to their environment, and to one another, go beyond these automatic, nonreflective conditioned responses by incorporating the process of subjective interpretation that occurs between stimulus and response. Mead regarded the **mind** itself as the **thinking process** whereby human beings seek to make sense of their environment in the process of adapting to it.

Human beings' strategies of coping with their environment are interrelated and interdependent. Through communication and interaction people develop shared interpretations of their environment as they adjust to one another's expectations and behaviors. But communication is merely the overt or external aspect of the internal thinking process. Because Mead believed that psychological behaviorists neglected this social dimension, he referred to his position as **social behaviorism**.

Topic 146: Symbolic meaning and behaviorism

The meaning of symbol is derived from the definition of gesture. Gesture is not only the first element of an act but also a sign of whole act. Growling by dogs: Gesture for the entire meaning of an act.

Visitor reaching a pack of cigarettes. Symbol → interpretation → action by the host.

Gestures are internalized as significant symbols by the group members, arousing the same response. For Mead, symbol is the stimulus whose response is given in advance.

A threatening person is knocked down. Action based on interpretation. Stimulus-response situation. Result of conversation of gestures. This stimulus-response is in line with the attitude of

the community. The relationship between stimulus and attitude to the stimulus means that it is a significant symbol. Common meaning to the stimulus and the expected appropriate response. Self interaction: the conversation of gestures that is going on in the mind of an individual. Significant symbols are gestures that possess meaning. Significant symbol is that part of the act that calls out the response of the other. It assumes its interpretation.

Does the other party consider the action (stimulus) as an insult?

Necessary to get into the communication with the other persons through symbols, and how the others interpret them. Finally they behave. Observable behavior also involves internal behavior of thinking. It has to be evaluated in the social context.

Topic 147: Life as ongoing process: Mind, Self, and Society

Mead considered life as an ongoing process of adaptation to environmental conditions.

Evolutionary approach. Attributes of species are the result of selection of their suitability for adaptation to conditions.

This is pragmatism. Humans are “pragmatic” creatures. Use the available facilities for achieving adjustment to the world. Variation in environment and available facilities. Adjustment can be unique to any individual/group/community. Adjustments based on rational thinking.

Call it a pragmatic behavior. Stimulus-response approach as well as pleasure and pain principle are compatible with behaviorist notions of reinforcement. Unique attributes of humans emerge out of the processes of adaptation and adjustment.

Such attributes can be:

- The capacity to use language i.e. symbols to designate objects in environment;
- Ability to talk to each other and to themselves;
- Ability to view themselves as objects; and
- Capacity to reason.

The most distinctive attributes are mind, self and society that emerge out of the basic process of adaptation. Each individual of human species is like the individuals of other species:

What they are is the result of the common biological heritage of their species as well as their adjustment to a given environment. Mead considered mind and self as the two distinctive aspects of human personality. Society as maintained by mind and self to be viewed as part of ongoing social processes.

Lesson 39**George H. Mead-II (Topic 148-150)****Topic 148: Mind: Contribution of interaction**

Mind is defined by Mead as a process and not a thing. Something functional not substantive. It is an inner conversation with one's self. Thinking. It arises and develops within the social process and is an integral part of that process. The social process precedes the mind. 'Mind' is the thinking ability that emerges out of social interaction. It arises and develops within the empirical matrix of interactions.

Gestures → central to communication → necessary for interaction.

Gesture acts as stimulus for (adjusted) response i.e. "conversation of gestures" → communication and interaction.

- What is the "meaning" of a gesture? Stimulus.
- What is the expected response?
- Shared meaning will signal the subsequent behavior of the other.
- May be called as adjusted response to each other.

It happens among living beings. Humans have the peculiar capacity to call out in themselves the response they are seeking to elicit from others. A distinctive quality of the mind is the ability of the individual: To call out in himself not only a single response of the other; But also the response of the community as a whole. Thus the thinking ability of an individual to give response to stimulus is termed as 'mind' i.e.

- To do anything now means a certain organized response; and
- If one has in himself that response, he has what is termed as 'mind.'

Mead also looks at the mind in another, pragmatic way i.e. The mind involves thought processes oriented toward problem solving. The real world is full of problems; and It is the function of the mind to try to solve those problems and permit people to operate more effectively in the world.

Topic 149: Symbols and Mind

The act involves only one person, but the social act involves two or more persons. The gesture is the basic mechanism in the social act and in the social process. For Mead 'gestures are movements of the first organism which act as specific stimuli calling forth the appropriate responses of the second organism.' Both lower animals and humans are capable of gestures. Growling of dogs. Instinctive (automatic response.) May not involve thought process. Call it "conversation of gestures." Mead calls such unconscious actions as 'non-significant gestures.' Humans ability to employ "significant" gestures i.e. thinking before action. Gestures can be physical and vocal.

Gestures become symbols, which can be:

- Significant;
- Made by humans.

Gestures become significant symbols when they arouse in the individual who is making them the same kind of response they are supposed to elicit from those to whom the gestures are addressed. Significant symbols are necessary for true communication. Physical gestures can be significant symbols. They are not ideally suited to be significant symbols because people cannot easily see or hear their own physical gestures. Vocal utterances are most likely to become significant symbols. The set of vocal gestures most likely to become significant symbols is language. Significant symbols have mutually agreed meaning i.e. with language the gestures and its meaning are communicated. For Mead, another function of significant symbols is that they make the mind, mental processes. Through significant symbols i.e. especially language, the human thinking is possible. Thinking is “simply an internalized or implicit conversation of the individual with himself by means of such gestures.” Thinking is the same as talking to other people. It amounts to talking to oneself. This is behaviorist approach. Human capacity for language (communication by symbols) makes for the emergence of their unique capacities for mind and self. Capacity for language is necessary to have a mind.

Mind involves several behavioral capacities:

- To denote objects in the environment with significant symbols;
- To use these symbols as a stimulus to one’s own response;
- To read and interpret the gestures of others and use these as a stimulus for one’s response;
- To temporarily suspend or inhibit overt behavioral responses to one’s own gestural denotations, or those of others;
- To ‘imaginatively rehearse’ alternative lines of conduct, visualize their consequences, and select the response that will facilitate adjustment to the environment.

Mind is “internal conversation of gestures.” Talking to self. The capacity for mind is not inborn. interaction necessary prerequisite.

Topic 150: Role-taking and mind

The capacity of mind is not inborn. It needs certain level of biological maturation. The most important requirement is individual’s social interaction. The emergence of mind is necessary for human survival. An individual, right from infancy, must adjust and adapt to social environment. For adjustment and adaptation to a world of organized activity emergence of mind is needed.

- Infants response to a stimulus is based on the inborn basic reflexes.
- The responses or actions are performed without conscious thinking.
- Such responses are neither efficient nor adaptive.
- Baby’s cry (a response) does not tell what it wants.
- Cannot read the vocal and other gestures of people around.
- Creates adjustment problems.

So there is a ‘selective pressure’ for acquiring the ability to use and interpret the significant gestures. The resultant adjustment to the environment. Using and interpreting significant gestures is a critical process. Ability to use significant symbols means the gestures emitted by others allows a person to read and interpret the dispositions of others. Can copy the gestures and potential actions of others. Mead called this process as ‘taking role of the other’ or *role taking*.

“Take on” the role or perspective of others i.e. to put oneself in the shoes of others. (A child copying the mother.)

Take on the role of others: to put themselves in someone else’s shoes. To understand how someone else feels and thinks and to anticipate how that person will act. They are talking with themselves. Inner conversation. Young children attain this ability only gradually. For Mead, thinking ability is mind. Role taking is critical to the emergence of mind.

Lesson 40**George H. Mead-III (Topic 151-153)****Topic 151: Self: Social nature**

The capacity to view oneself as an object in the field of experience is a type of learned behavior. Learning takes place through interaction with others. Self is something, which is developed. It is not there at birth. Arises in the process of social experience and activity. Interaction. The self is not part of the body. It does not exist at birth. Self develops only as individual interacts with others. Interaction is experienced through the exchange of symbols i.e. language. The process requires the capacity to use language, and to take the role of others.

Social self emerges out of a process in which an individual:

- Reads the gestures of others (their attitudes); and
- Derives an image or picture of him-self as a certain type of object in a situation.

The process was labeled as looking glass self by Cooley. Image of self acts as a stimulus calling for a certain response. Responses act as stimulus for others to respond. Emission of gestures, enable to take on the role of others. It acts as stimulus for others. Responses. Interaction. Helps in making adjustments in the role in view of the others reactions and their interpretations. Individuals do not experience directly but indirectly through reading the gestures of others. Standpoint of others in a social group. Call it a 'generalized' standpoint of the group to which an individual belongs. Becomes an object to oneself. Accepts the attitude of others toward oneself in a particular context. Multiple situations, multiple contexts, multiple experiences, and multiple attitudes. Self a product of social interaction, hence has a social nature.

Topic 152: Self: "I" and "Me"

Self has two parts. One part operates as subject, being active, creative, and spontaneous. Mead called the active part as "*I*" (subjective form of the personal pronoun). I shook hands with him. "*I*" is the self as subject: the active, spontaneous, creative part of the self. The other part of the self works as an object: the way we imagine others see us. Composed of others' attitudes internalized from our interactions. Mead called this objective side of the self the "*me*" (objective form of the personal pronoun). He shook hands with me. All social experience has both components. We initiate an action (*I*-phase or subject side of self). We continue the action based on how others respond to us (the *me*-phase, or object side, of self). The image of the person's behavior is what Mead termed as *me*.

Me represents the attitudes of others and the broader community. The attitudes influence individual's retrospective interpretation of behavior. These are *me* images that are received by reading the gestures of specific others. In contrast to "*me*" is the "*I*," which is the actual emission of behavior. When a person speaks too loudly, this is "*I*." When a person reacts to this loudness, the "*me*" phase of action is initiated. "*I*" can only be known in experience (wait for "*me*" images to know just what "*I*" did.) "*Me*" is the expectations of others about the "*I*." "*I*" and "*me*" represent self as a constant process of behavior and self image. People act:

- View themselves as objects;
- Assess the consequences of action;
- Interpret other's reaction; and
- Decide how to act in future.

“I” has a built-in mechanism of social control. Self is a process of adaptation to the environment.

Topic 153: The genesis of self

Emergence of self and self-conception in humans. Self is social product. A type of behavior that emerges from the efforts of human organism to adjust and adapt to its environment. Emergence of self is a process. For self to develop, infant must acquire the ability to use significant symbols. Ability to use significant symbols is necessary for:

- Role-taking with others;
- Interpret the gestures of others; and
- Develop an image of oneself.

Self is also dependent on the capacities of mind. People must be able to:

- Linguistically designate themselves as an object in their field of experience; and
- Organize the others' responses toward themselves as an object.

Therefore, the preconditions of the development of self are:

- The use of significant symbols;
- The ability to role-taking; and
- The behavioral capacities of mind.

Lesson 41**George H. Mead-III (Topic 154-157)****Topic 154: Genesis of Self (Cont.)**

Mead visualized the development of self in three stages. Each stage marked by an increased capacity to role-take with wider audience.

1. Play stage: Very limited capacity to role-take with wider audience. Child can assume the perspective of only one or two others at a time. Imaginary companions. Child may enact the role of mother. May also assume the role of its baby.

2. Game stage: Biological maturation. child can take the role of multiple others busy in ongoing and organized activity. In game, the child must assume the role of other players, anticipate their actions, and coordinate with the team. The number and variety of such situations expands. Child sees himself as an object in relation to others. Derives images of itself from the viewpoint of others.

3. Generalized other: “Community of attitudes” among members of a collectivity. Individual views itself in relation to “community of attitudes” and adjusts accordingly. This is role taking with generalized other. For Mead, play and game present the initial stages in the development of self. In the final stage, individual can generalize the varied attitudes of others. Can see and regulate its actions from a broader perspective. Generalized other reflects the norms, values, attitudes, and expectations of the people “in general.” In a complex society, there can be multiple generalized others. Individuals adjust to specific and generalized attitudes of others. At this stage, individuals possess a *complete* and *unified* self.

Topic 155-156: Society: Conception, Process, and Culture**Conception of society**

Mead is widely known in sociology for his concept of the “Self,” but much less for his concept of “Society.”

The two concepts are intimately connected in his thought. It is simply impossible to fully understand Mead’s concept of Self without an appropriate understanding of his concept of Society. Society is the organism within which self arises. Human society could not exist without minds and selves. Society presupposes the possession of minds and selves by its individual members. Yet mind and self cannot develop unless there is society. Individual members would not possess minds and selves if there is no society.

Mead used the term society in two senses:

1. Society refers to ongoing, organized activity among pluralities of individuals.
The activity may be of a small group or of a total society.
2. Society pertains to geopolitical units, such as nation-states (morphology).

For Mead, the term society primarily means the ongoing social process that precedes both the mind and the self. Given its importance in shaping the mind and self, society is clearly of central importance to Mead. Society to Mead represents the organized set of responses that are taken over by the individual in the form of the “me.” In this sense individuals carry society around with them, giving them the ability, through self-criticism, to control themselves.

The process of society

Recognize the general nature of the processes underlying the maintenance of social order.
Requires the identification of the relevant factors or variables that influence:

- (1) the accuracy of role taking, and
- (2) the convergence of “generalized others.”

Divergent “generalized others” in a socially differentiated society. Different situations, different roles, different sets of expectations, different “generalized others.” Divergent community of attitudes. Role-taking with varieties of specific and “generalized others.”

Coordination issue.

The coordination of action made possible by behavioral capacities of mind and self.
Not only the society is created by role-taking, but it can be changed by the same processes.
A society may have variety of actors, differentiated social situations, community of attitudes, and the regulation of actions. People do readjust.

Society is maintained:

- by virtue of humans’ ability to role-take with each other, and
- to assume the perspective of ‘generalized others.’

The structure and dynamics of society influence the number, salience, scope, and proximity of “generalized others.” Humans readjust.

The culture of society

Mead never used the concept of *culture* in the modern sense of the term. Culture is system of symbols by which human thought, perception, action are mobilized and regulated. Humans regulate their conduct in terms of ‘generalized others’ who embody these communities of attitudes. “Generalized other” refers to those symbol systems of broader cultural systems that regulate perception, thought, and action. Mead’s “generalized other” includes norms, values, beliefs and other regulatory systems of symbols. Individuals with mind and self, role-take with varieties of “generalized others.” “Generalized others” regulate their conduct and coordinate their actions. Mead’s conception of society emphasizes the basic nature of processes underlying the on-going social activity. He was not concerned with details of social structure or components of culture. Regardless of the structure of society, the processes by which society is created, maintained, and changed are the same.

Topic 157: The Act: The Basic Unit of Behavior

The most basic unit of behavior is “the act.” The behavior of an individual is nothing more than a series of acts. Acts may be enacted singularly but more often emitted simultaneously. In order to get insight into the nature of human behavior, it is necessary to comprehend the constituents of behavior i.e. the “acts.”

Basic assumptions:

- Acts are part of a larger life process of organisms adjusting to their environmental conditions.
- Human acts are unique due to their capacities for mind and self.
- What motivates humans to act?
- How does it operate? Or how the behavior of human organisms with mind and self and operating within society is initiated and directed?

Mead visualized:

The act is composed of four stages:

1. The impulse;
2. Perception;
3. Manipulation; and
4. Consummation.

The four stages are not entirely discrete i.e. blend into each other.

Also they constitute distinctive phases involving somewhat different behavioral capacities.

Stages of a given act are:

Not separable from each other or

Not isolated from the stages of another act.

Humans can simultaneously be involved in different stages of different acts. Acts vary in length, degree of overlap, consistency, intensity, and similar other states.

Lesson 42**George H. Mead-IV (Topic 158-163)****Topic 158: Stages of Act: Impulse****Impulse**

For Mead, an *impulse* represents a state of disequilibrium or tension between an organism and its environment.

Two implicit propositions:

1. The greater the degree of disequilibrium between an organism and its environment, the stronger the impulse and more likely is behavior to reflect this fact.
2. The longer an impulse persists, the more it will serve to initiate and guide behavior until it is consumed.

Sources of disequilibrium for an organism :

Some impulses come from organic needs that are unfulfilled.

Others come from interpersonal maladjustments.

Still others come from self-inflicted reflections.

Many are a combination of organic, interpersonal, an intra-psychic sources of tension.

Key point is that: Impulses initiate efforts at their consummation, while giving the behavior of an organism a general direction. Though: A state of disequilibrium can be eliminated in many different ways. The specific direction of behavior will be determined by the conditions of the environment. For Mead, humans are not pushed and pulled around by impulses. Contrarily, an impulse is defined in terms of the degree of harmony with the environment. The precise ways it is consummated are influenced by the manner in which an organism is prepared to adjust to its environment. Hunger, an organic drive, is seen as arising from behavioral adaptations to the environment. Types of foods considered edible, the way they are eaten, and when they can be eaten will be shaped by environmental forces as they impinge on actors with mind and self. For Mead, impulse initiates behavior and gives it a general direction. The next stage of the act – perception – will determine what aspects of the environment are relevant for eliminating the impulse.

Topic 159: Stages of Act: Perception**Perception**

To become aware through senses. What people see in their environment is highly selective. Selective awareness or perception. One basis for selective perception is the impulse. People become attuned to those objects in their environment perceived relevant to the elimination of an impulse. What objects are seen as relevant to eliminating a given impulse? Depends on past socialization, self-conceptions, and expectations from generalized others. Will hungry person see a cow as a relevant object of food? Depends on how he has been sensitized to potential food objects. The process of perception thus sensitizes an individual to certain objects in the environment. As objects, they become stimuli for repertoires of behavioral responses. Storage of permissible

responses to stimuli. Perception is simply the arousal of potential responses to stimuli. As the organism becomes aware of relevant objects, it also is prepared to act in certain ways. Humans approach objects with a series of hypotheses or notions about how certain responses toward objects can eliminate their disequilibrium.

Topic 160: Manipulation

Manipulation

Emission of behaviors toward objects is termed manipulation. Process of handling in a skillful manner. Humans have mind and self, therefore they can engage in covert as well as overt manipulation.

Humans can covertly:

- Imagine consequences of action toward objects for eliminating an impulse;
- Manipulate the world; and
- Imagine the consequences of various lines of action.

What determines whether manipulation will be covert before it is overt?

The key condition is what Mead saw as *blockage*. Blockage is a condition where the consummation of an impulse is inhibited or delayed. Look at breaking a pencil while writing. Creating an impulse or disequilibrium with the environment. Leads to efforts at manipulation.

Possible outcomes:

- Sees pile of pencils readily available.
- Covertly starts thinking about finding a pencil.

Blockage of the impulse generates conscious imagery, manipulation becomes overt. When impulse, perception, and overt manipulation stages of the act do not lead to consummation, thinking occurs and manipulation becomes covert. Utilize capacities of mind and self. In case of blockage, an actor immediately starts covert thinking. Thinking is a behavioral adaptation of an organism experiencing disequilibrium with its environment and unable to perceive objects or manipulate behaviors in ways leading to consummation of an impulse.

In the process of thinking:

- An actor comes to perceive relevant objects;
- The actor may even role-take with the object if it is an other individual or a group;
- Self image may be derived, and one may see self as yet another object; and
- Various lines of conduct are imaginatively rehearsed.
- The stage of manipulation involves behavior, feedback, readjustment of behavior, feedback, readjustment.
- Process continues until an impulse is eliminated.
- Call it 'cybernetic' having automatic control systems.
- Requires persistent motivation.

Motivation is a process of constant adjustment and readjustment of behaviors to restore equilibrium with the environment. Assumption: the more often an impulse is blocked, the more it grows in intensity, and the more it consumes the process of thinking and the phases of self.

Topic 161: Consummation

Consummation

Consummation denotes the completion of an act through the elimination of disequilibrium between an organism and its environment. For any person, there are multiple impulses operating, each at:

- Various stages of consummation, and
- Potential points of blockage.

Successful consummation of acts leads to the development of stable behavior patterns. Become guidelines for others. For humans, perception involves seeing:

- Physical objects, oneself,
- Others, and
- Various generalized others as part of their environment.

Manipulation for humans with the capacities for mind and self involves:

- Overt behavior; and
- Covert deliberations.

Covertly individuals weigh alternatives and assess their consequences. Alternatives and consequences assessed with reference to:

- Individuals' conception,
- The expectations of specific others, and
- Various generalized others.

Humans must live and survive in social groups. Consummation for humans almost always revolves around adaptation to, and cooperation with, others in ongoing collective enterprises. The point of blockage at any point determines the strength of a particular stage of act. Intense impulses are typically those that have been blocked, thereby causing heightened perception. Heightened perception generates greater overt and covert manipulation. If blockage occurs, then perception is further heightened, as are impulses. Same applies to manipulation. If manipulation is unsuccessful, escalated covert manipulation ensues, thereby heightened perception and impulse. Why people initiate action and why behaviors take a certain direction? Humans initiate and direct their actions in an effort to achieve integration into ongoing social process.

Topic 162: George H. Mead Summarizing the Contributions

Mead's basic premise of behaviorism: Behaviors that facilitate the adjustment and adaptation of organisms to their environment will be retained. For any individual organism, its environment is society. The young infant must adjust to society. Develop its behavioral capacities for: language,

- role-taking,
- mind, and
- self.

For the mature individual, the continued use of the fundamental capacities is essential for ongoing adjustment and adaptation to society. For Mead, the capacities for mind and self are behaviors.

These capacities assure that much human action will be:

- Covert, and Involve role-taking, reflective thinking, self-criticism, and self-assessment.
- Behavioral capacities for mind and self make humans distinctive.

Only out of interaction by actors with mind and self is society possible. For a species not organized by instincts, as are ants and bees, the ability to role-take becomes crucial in such interactions. Humans have to learn their behaviors. Impulses are both caused and constrained by the capacity to role-take as regulated by the culture. Cultural constraints on impulses allow for the organization of species into society. The behavioral abilities facilitate the adjustment and adaptation of the species as a whole to the environment. Acquisition of mind and self enables the individual to adapt to its social environment. The flexible interactive abilities of individuals with mind and self facilitate the species' adaptation to the environment. Helps in the creation, maintenance, and change of society.

Topic 163: Concluding Remarks

The main focus of this perspective's has been on the discussions of:

- ✧ The self;
- ✧ Self-interaction;
- ✧ Taking the role of other;
- ✧ Interpretation;
- ✧ Gestures; and
- ✧ Symbolic meanings.
- The discussions of these major areas have emphasized on studying processes of interaction between individuals. The methodology primarily used has been inductive, qualitative, and geared toward micro-sociological analysis.
- The perspective is basically a socio-psychological. The results can be described as a “moving picture” rather than a still photograph of human behavior, providing a close-up picture.
- This perspective places primary value on:
 - Subjective meaning; and
 - On processes opposed to structure.
- Researchers:
 - Take great pains to capture the “world of other” as seen by that other,
 - Ask important sociological questions that cannot be answered by mainstream sociology
- This perspective does not appear to be a “mainstream” of sociology. Nevertheless, many of its core concepts have been accepted. Some interactionists have developed concepts that connect the macro and structural demands of sociology.

- Symbolic interactionism can be seen as an alternative perspective providing theoretical tools missing in other perspectives. It follows a distinctive approach that makes important contributions to sociology. Symbolic interactionism has experienced resurgence recently.

Lesson 43**Symbolic Interactions: Some basic principles (Topic164-165)****Topic 164: Symbolic Interactions: Some basic principles**

Some symbolic interactionists (Blumer, 1969a; Manis and Meltzer, 1978; A. Rose, 1962; Snow, 2001) have tried to enumerate the basic principles of the theory.

These principles include the following:

1. Human beings, unlike lower animals, are endowed with the capacity for thought.
2. The capacity for thought is shaped by social interaction.
3. In social interaction people learn the meanings and the symbols that allow them to exercise their distinctively human capacity for thought.
4. Meanings and symbols allow people to carry on distinctively human action and interaction.
5. People are able to modify or alter the meanings and symbols that they use in action and interaction on the basis of their interpretation of the situation.
6. People are able to make these modifications and alterations because, in part, of their ability to interact with themselves, which allows them to examine possible courses of action, assess their relative advantages and disadvantages, and then choose one.
7. The intertwined patterns of action

Topic 165: Capacity for thought & Thinking and interaction**Capacity for Thought**

The crucial assumption that human beings possess the ability to think differentiates symbolic interactionism from its behaviorist roots. This assumption also provides the basis for the entire theoretical orientation of symbolic interactionism. Bernard Meltzer, James Petras, and Larry Reynolds stated that the assumption of the human capacity for thought is one of the major contributions of early symbolic interactionists, such as James, Dewey, Thomas, Cooley, and of course, Mead: “Individuals in human society were not seen as units that are motivated by external or internal forces beyond their control, or within the confines of a more or less fixed structure. Rather, they were viewed as reflective or interacting units which comprise the societal entity” (1975:42). The ability to think enables people to act reflectively rather than just behave unreflectively. People must often construct and guide what they do, rather than just release it. The ability to think is embedded in the mind, but the symbolic interactionists have a somewhat unusual conception of the mind as originating in the socialization of consciousness. They distinguish it



from the physiological brain. People must have brains in order to develop minds, but a brain does not inevitably produce a mind, as is clear in the case of lower animals (Troyer, 1946). Also, symbolic interactionists do not conceive of the mind as a thing, a physical structure, but rather as a continuing process. It is a process that is itself part of the larger process of stimulus and response. The mind is related to virtually every other aspect of symbolic interactionism, including socialization, meanings, symbols, the self, interaction, and even society.

Thinking and Interaction

People possess only a general capacity for thought. This capacity must be shaped and refined in the process of social interaction. Such a view leads the symbolic interactionist to focus on a specific form of social interaction— *socialization*. The human ability to think is developed early in childhood socialization and is refined during adult socialization. Symbolic interactionists have a view of the socialization process that is different from that of most other sociologists. To symbolic interactionists, conventional sociologists are likely to see socialization as simply a process by which people learn the things that they need to survive in society (for instance, culture, role expectations). To the symbolic interactionists, socialization is a more dynamic process that allows people to develop the ability to think, to develop in distinctively human ways. Furthermore, socialization is not simply a one-way process in which the actor receives information, but is a dynamic process in which the actor shapes and adapts the information to his or her own needs (Manis and Meltzer, 1978:6).

Symbolic interactionists are, of course, interested not simply in socialization but in interaction in general, which is of “vital importance in its own right” (Blumer, 1969b:8). *Interaction* is the process in which the ability to think is both developed and expressed. All types of interaction, not just interaction during socialization, refine our ability to think. Beyond that, thinking shapes the interaction process. In most interaction, actors must take account of others and decide if and how to fit their activities to others. However, not all interaction involves thinking. The differentiation made by Blumer (following Mead) between two basic forms of social interaction is relevant here. The first, nonsymbolic interaction—Mead’s conversation of gestures—does not involve thinking. The second, symbolic interaction, does require mental processes.

The importance of thinking to symbolic interactionists is reflected in their views on *objects*. Blumer differentiates among three types of objects: *physical objects*, such as a chair or a tree; *social objects*, such as a student or a mother; and *abstract objects*, such as an idea or a moral principle. Objects are seen simply as things “out there” in the real world; what is of greatest significance is the way they are defined by actors. The latter leads to the relativistic view that different objects have different meanings for different individuals: “A tree will be a different object to a botanist, a lumberman, a poet, and a home gardener” (Blumer, 1969b:11).

Individuals learn the meanings of objects during the socialization process. Most of us learn a common set of meanings, but in many cases, as with the tree mentioned above, we have different definitions of the same objects. Although this definitional view can be taken to an extreme, symbolic interactionists need not deny the existence of objects in the real world. All they need do

is point out the crucial nature of the definition of those objects as well as the possibility that actors may have different definitions of the same object. As Herbert Blumer said: “The nature of an object . . . consists of the meaning that it has for the person for whom it is an object” (1969b:11).



Lesson 44**Learning meanings and symbols (Topic 166-167)****Topic 166: Learning meanings and symbols**

Symbolic interactionists, following Mead, tend to accord causal significance to social interaction. Thus, meaning stems not from solitary mental processes but from interaction. This focus derives from Mead's pragmatism: he focused on human action and interaction, not on isolated mental processes. Symbolic interactionists have in general continued in this direction. Among other things, the central concern is not how people mentally create meanings and symbols but how they learn them during interaction in general and socialization in particular.

People learn symbols as well as meanings in social interaction. Whereas people respond to signs unthinkingly, they respond to symbols in a thoughtful manner. Signs stand for themselves (for example, the gestures of angry dogs or water to a person dying of thirst). “*Symbols are social objects used to represent* (or ‘stand in for,’ ‘take the place of’) whatever people agree they shall represent” (Charon, 1998:47). Not all social objects stand for other things, but those that do are symbols. Words, physical artifacts, and physical actions (for example, the word *boat*, a cross or a Star of David, and a clenched fist) all can be symbols. People often use symbols to communicate something about themselves: they drive Rolls-Royces, for instance, to communicate a certain style of life.

Symbolic interactionists conceive of language as a vast system of symbols. Words are symbols because they are used to stand for things. Words make all other symbols possible. Acts, objects, and other words exist and have meaning only because they have been and can be described through the use of words. Symbols are crucial in allowing people to act in distinctively human ways. Because of the symbol, the human being “does not respond passively to a reality that imposes itself but actively creates and re-creates the world acted in” (Charon, 1998:69). In addition to this general utility, symbols in general and language in particular have a number of specific functions for the actor.

First, symbols enable people to deal with the material and social world by allowing them to name, categorize, and remember the objects they encounter there. In this way, people are able to order a world that otherwise would be confusing. Language allows people to name, categorize, and especially remember much more efficiently than they could with other kinds of symbols, such as pictorial images. Second, symbols improve people's ability to perceive the environment. Instead of being flooded by a mass of indistinguishable stimuli, the actor can be alerted to some parts of the environment rather than others. Third, symbols improve the ability to think. Although a set of pictorial symbols would allow a limited ability to think, language greatly expands this ability. Thinking, in these terms, can be conceived of as symbolic interaction with one's self. Fourth, symbols greatly increase the ability to solve various problems. Lower animals must use trial-and-error, but human beings can think through symbolically a variety of alternative actions before actually taking one. This ability reduces the chance of making costly mistakes. Fifth, the use of symbols allows actors to transcend time, space, and even their own persons. Through the use of symbols, actors can imagine what it was like to live in the past or what it might be like to live in the future. In addition, actors can transcend their own persons symbolically and imagine what the

world is like from another person's point of view. This is the well-known symbolic-interactionist concept of *taking the role of the other* (D. Miller, 1981). Sixth, symbols allow us to imagine a metaphysical reality, such as heaven or hell. Seventh, and most generally, symbols allow people to avoid being enslaved by their environment. They can be active rather than passive—that is, self-directed in what they do.

Topic 167: Action and interaction & Modification of meanings and symbols

Symbolic interactionists' primary concern is with the impact of meanings and symbols on human action and interaction. Here it is useful to employ Mead's differentiation between covert and overt behavior. Covert behavior is the thinking process, involving symbols and meanings. Overt behavior is the actual behavior performed by an actor. Some overt behavior does not involve covert behavior (habitual behavior or mindless responses to external stimuli). However, most human action involves both kinds. Covert behavior is of greatest concern to symbolic interactionists, whereas overt behavior is of greatest concern to exchange theorists or to traditional behaviorists in general.

Meanings and symbols give human social action (which involves a single actor) and social interaction (which involves two or more actors engaged in mutual social action) distinctive characteristics. Social action is that in which the individuals are acting with others in mind. In other words, in undertaking an action, people simultaneously try to gauge its impact on the other actors involved. Although they often engage in mindless, habitual behavior, people have the capacity to engage in social action.

In the process of social interaction, people symbolically communicate meanings to the others involved. The others interpret those symbols and orient their responding action on the basis of their interpretation. In other words, in social interaction, actors engage in a process of mutual influence. Christopher (2001) refers to this dynamic social interaction as a “dance” that partners engage in.

Lesson 45**Making choices (Topic 168-170)****Topic 168: Making choices**

Partly because of the ability to handle meanings and symbols, people, unlike lower animals, can make choices in the actions in which they engage. People need not accept the meanings and symbols that are imposed on them from without. On the basis of their own interpretation of the situation, “humans are capable of forming new meanings and new lines of meaning” (Manis and Meltzer, 1978:7). Thus, to the symbolic interactionist, actors have at least some autonomy. They are not simply constrained or determined; they are capable of making unique and independent choices. Furthermore, they are able to develop a life that has a unique style (Perinbanayagam, 1985:53). W. I. Thomas and Dorothy Thomas were instrumental in underscoring this creative capacity in their concept of definition of the situation: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas, 1928:572). The Thomases knew that most of our definitions of situations have been provided for us by society. In fact, they emphasized this point, identifying especially the family and the community as sources of our social definitions. However, the Thomases’ position is distinctive for its emphasis on the possibility of “spontaneous” individual definitions of situations, which allow people to alter and modify meanings and symbols. This ability of actors to make a difference is reflected in an essay by Gary Fine and Sherry Kleinman (1983) in which they look at the phenomenon of a “social network.” Instead of viewing a social network as an unconscious and/or constraining social structure, Fine and Kleinman see a network as a set of social relationships that people endow with meaning and use for personal and/or collective purposes.

Topic 169: Groups and societies

Symbolic interactionists are generally highly critical of the tendency of other sociologists to focus on macro structures. As Paul Rock says, “Interactionism discards most macrosociological thought as an unsure and overambitious metaphysics . . . not accessible to intelligent examination” (1979:238). Dmitri Shalin points to “interactionist criticism aimed at the classical view of social order as external, atemporal, determinate at any given moment and resistant to change” (1986:14). Rock also says, “Whilst it [symbolic interactionism] does not wholly shun the idea of social structure, its stress upon activity and process relegates structural metaphors to a most minor place” (1979:50).

Blumer is in the forefront of those who are critical of this “sociological determinism [in which] the social action of people is treated as an outward flow or expression of forces playing on them rather than as acts which are built up by people through their interpretation of the situations in which they are placed” (1962/1969:84). This focus on the constraining effects of large-scale social structures leads traditional sociologists to a set of assumptions about the actor and action different from those held by symbolic interactionists. Instead of seeing actors as those who actively define their situations, traditional sociologists tend to reduce actors to “mindless robots on the societal or aggregate level” (Manis and Meltzer, 1978:7). In an effort to stay away from determinism and a robotlike view of actors, symbolic interactionists take a very different view of large-scale social structures, a view that is ably presented by Blumer. To Blumer, society is not made up of macro

structures. The essence of society is to be found in actors and action: “Human society is to be seen as consisting of acting people, and the life of the society is to be seen as consisting of their actions” (Blumer, 1962/1969:85). Human society is action; group life is a “complex of ongoing activity.” However, society is not made up of an array of isolated acts. There is collective action as well, which involves “individuals fitting their lines of action to one another . . . participants making indications to one another, not merely each to himself ” (Blumer, 1969b:16). This gives rise to what Mead called the *social act* and Blumer calls *joint action*.

Blumer accepted the idea of emergence—that large-scale structures emerge from micro processes (Morriane, 1988). According to Maines, “The key to understanding Blumer’s treatment of large-scale organizations rests on his conception of joint action” (1988:46). A joint action is not simply the sum total of individual acts—it comes to have a character of its own. A joint action thus is not external to or coercive of actors and their actions; rather, it is created by actors and their actions. The study of joint action is, in Blumer’s view, the domain of the sociologist.

From this discussion one gets the sense that the joint act is almost totally flexible—that is, that society can become almost anything the actors want it to be. However, Blumer was not prepared to go as far as that. He argued that each instance of joint action must be formed anew, but he did recognize that joint action is likely to have a “well-established and repetitive form” (Blumer, 1969b:17). Not only does most joint action recur in patterns, but Blumer also was willing to admit that such action is guided by systems of preestablished meanings, such as culture and social order. It would appear that Blumer admitted that there are large-scale structures and that they are important. Here Blumer followed Mead (1934/1962), who admitted that such structures are very important. However, such structures have an extremely limited role in symbolic interactionism. 10 For one thing, Blumer most often argued that large-scale structures are little more than “frameworks” within which the really important aspects of social life, action and interaction, take place (1962/1969:87). Large-scale structures do set the conditions and limitations on human action, but they do not determine it. In his view, people do not act within the context of structures such as society; rather, they act in situations. Large-scale structures are important in that they shape the situations in which individuals act and supply to actors the fixed set of symbols that enable them to act.

Even when Blumer discussed such preestablished patterns, he hastened to make it clear that “areas of unprescribed conduct are just as natural, indigenous, and recurrent in human group life as those areas covered by preestablished and faithfully followed prescriptions of joint action” (1969b:18). Not only are there many unprescribed areas, but even in prescribed areas joint action has to be created and re-created consistently. Actors are guided by generally accepted meanings in this creation and re-creation, but they are not determined by them. They may accept them as is, but they also can make minor and even major alterations in them. In Blumer’s words, “It is the social process in group life that creates and upholds the rules, not the rules that create and uphold group life” (1969b:19).

Clearly, Blumer was not inclined to accord culture independent and coercive status in his theoretical system. Nor was he about to accord this status to the extended connections of group life, or what is generally called “social structure,” for example, the division of labor. “A network or an institution does not function automatically because of some inner dynamics or system

requirements; it functions because people at different points do something, and what they do is a result of how they define the situation in which they are called on to act” (Blumer, 1969b:19).

Topic 170: Concluding remarks

The single most important theory in symbolic interactionism is that of G. H. Mead. Substantively, Mead’s theory accorded primacy and priority to the social world. It is out of the social world that consciousness, the mind, the self, and so on, emerge.

▪ Symbolic interactionism has been criticized like:

1. The mainstream of symbolic interactionism has too readily given up on conventional scientific techniques.

- ✧ “Just because the contents of consciousness are qualitative, does not mean that their exterior expression cannot be coded, classified, even counted.”
- ✧ Science and subjectivism are not mutually exclusive.

2. There is vagueness of essential Meadian concepts such as mind, self, I, and me.

- ✧ Basic concepts being confused and imprecise and therefore incapable of providing a firm basis for theory and research.
- ✧ Difficult to operationalize the concepts.
- ✧ Resultantly testable propositions cannot be generated.

3. Symbolic interactionism has a tendency to downplay or ignore large-scale social structures.

- ✧ The concept of social structure is necessary to deal with the incredible density and complexity of relations through which episodes of interaction are interconnected.
- ✧ It minimizes the facts of social structure and the impact of the macro-organizational features of society on behavior.

4. Symbolic interactionism is not sufficiently microscopic.

- ✧ It ignores the importance of factors such as the unconscious and emotions.
- ✧ It ignores the psychological factors such as needs, motives, intentions, and aspirations.
- ✧ Psychological factors might impel the actor to act.
- ✧ Symbolic interactionism has moved in a decidedly micro direction.
- ✧ It is in contrast to at least the implications of the more integrative title of Mead’s Mind, Self and Society.
- ✧ Symbolic interactionism has entered a new, “post-Blumerian” age.
- ✧ It is argued Blumerian theory always had an interest in macro-level phenomena.
- ✧ Ongoing efforts to synthesize symbolic interactionism with ideas derived from a number of other theories.
- ✧ This “new” symbolic interactionism has “cobbled a new theory from the shards of other theoretical approaches,” both micro and macro. Trying to redefine Mead’s ideas.

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