The Sociological Imagination

"Who more than others, and why?" when thinking theoretically

Some opening insights from C. Wright Mills:

Self and Society

Individual characteristics have social meaning

"Who's Got the Power?"

Consider "personal troubles" and "social issues with "a sociological imagination."

-Unemployment

-Health care

What good is the sociological imagination?

1. Question common assumptions

2. Recognize opportunities and constraints

3. Push back for social good

Research Methods

For reference:

Martin, Patricia Yancy, and Robert J. Hummer. 1989. "Fraternities and Rape on Campus." *Gender and Society* 3:457-473.

Steps in the scientific process of research:

1. Select a topic
2. State the problem and its significance (clarify: independent and dependent variable)

3. Review the literature -- develop theory.

4. Formulate your research HYPOTHESIS. (in terms of the Independent and Dependent variable)

5. Collect Data in one of more of the following ways: (with concern for "validity" and "reliability")
    a. Surveys – Questionnaires and Interviews

    b. Experiments

    c. Participant observation

    d. Unobtrusive measures/existing data.
        - content analysis

        - secondary data

6. Conclude: Report findings/discuss implications. Raise new questions

7. Subject work to critique

Ethical issues in research – Informed consent and anonymity/confidentiality

Sociological Theory I – Macro Theory

Introductory remarks on two basic Macro perspectives: Functionalism & Conflict Theory
        (Think BIG – Country, Culture, Society). Right and Left Wing

The "Fathers" of the Field (The Dead White Guys)

1. Emile Durkheim and Suicide: Solidarity. Integration. Stability. Order. Consensus.

2. Karl Marx & the Communist Manifesto: Conflict Theory.   Competition for scarce resources.
Struggle for power, control, autonomy. "The harder I work the better he does."

3. Max Weber and the Protestant Ethic. Kind of a Macro Micro link. Protestant Ethic is a
cultural value and an individual characteristic. (The Sociological Imagination)

Functionalism and Conflict Theory in greater detail: Handout notes follow.

A summary of MACRO THEORIES: Functionalism and Conflict

1. Functionalism:

Functionalist view of Society:

- INSTITUTIONS fit people into their slots. They provide people with stability and security. (Gov't, Family, Church, School, Economy, Health care.)

- Successful societies provide jobs and roles for their people that are appropriate to their place. Inequality is functional; the cream rises to the top.

- Institutions should be inter-dependent so that the society reaches a balanced equilibrium.

- Morality is defined in terms of consensus. What the majority agree is right, is right.

- Dissent is considered deviant; change EVOLVES slowly as consensus is reached.

Functionalist view of Human Nature:

- People are naturally competitive; self-interest is natural; personal needs take priority over the needs of others. As in species evolution, the fittest survive.

- Humans are capable of reason. This ability to reason suggests it is a rational choice to surrender to social authority; cohesion, agreement. Consensus promotes stability.

- People are fundamentally different according to talents and abilities. Therefore, people are of different kinds of WORTH. This motivates and justifies stratification systems which put people in different slots in the society according to social class. Some argue this is necessary to motivate people to fill functionally important roles, eg. physicians, teachers, etc. (And some have to flip the burgers and fry the chicken)

- Functionalists suggest people are happiest when they are filling their proper place in the smoothly functioning part of the larger whole.

Functionalist sociology:

- Uses scientific method to search for the social conditions that produce order & consensus.
- Hands off approach; let the world evolve according to what functions are needed.
- Research is based on gathering DATA.
- Seeks to answer questions related to creating an orderly and fair world.

Examples of this perspective at work in the society:
- College entrance exams; de-regulation of industry. Free competition. Church tax breaks

2. Conflict Theory:

Marx: Saw as the basis for defining society the struggle between workers (proletariat) and factory owners (who control capital and the means of production). Workers have no power but their labor; labor becomes a powerful driving force in the quest for equality.

- The engine of society is the class struggle between the owners of the means of production (factories in Marx's time) and the workers who produce more income from their labor than they are paid (surplus value for the owner.) "The harder I work the better he does."

Conflict view of Society

- A society can be judged according to the degree to which its institutions treat people humanely.

- Inhumane societies are those with characterized by social inequality; which breeds conflict.

- It is morally legitimate to challenge institutions which perpetuate inhumanity.

Conflict view of Human Nature:

- People are naturally cooperative.

- Who we are as people is shaped by what we do. Our labor is the basis for our identity.

- Humans can always improve themselves.

Conflict Sociology:

- Studies classes, institutions, organizations and observes how they interact.

- CHANGE is the primary focus of study. Conflict is inevitable in the world-view of conflict sociologists;

- Society is studied in terms which measure social processes which make social institutions more just and humane.

Conflict theory in action:

- The struggle for equal rights: women and minorities; the civil rights movement and feminism. LGBTQ+ Jackie Robinson, Martin Luther King, Jr., Gloria Steinem, Harvey Milk.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST (MICRO) SOCIOLOGY

Symbolic interactionists, simply try to observe, and INTERPRET small group behavior and circumstances on the basis of shared meanings which emerge from understanding SYMBOLS. Interactionist sociology examines human behavior at the individual (micro) level as opposed to the level of social institutions (macro). The Interactionist perspective is sometimes called social psychology.

W.I. Thomas: "If men (sic) define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."

Examples and Studies

1. Theoretical foundations: Interactionist perspective
     - Cooley/Looking Glass Self

     - Mead/Emerging Self: Imitative stage. Play stage. Game stage

     - Goffman/Dramaturgical approach. An indicator of mental health.

SOCIAL GROUPS
          - Primary group

          - Secondary groups

           - In-groups and out-groups

          - Reference groups

          - Dyads & triads

          - Conformity - work of Asch and Milgram

               News. Fake news. "Measure the Line!"

A Summary of MICRO-THEORY: Symbolic Interactionism

Micro-sociology: defines society in terms of INTERACTION and PERCEPTION, and the construction of IDENTITY.

Symbolic interactionism asserts that society comtains symbols which people use to establish meaning and relationships, to coordinate actions, & to develop a view of the world and the self;

Symbolic interactionists, simply try to observe, and INTERPRET small group behavior and circumstances on the basis of shared meanings which emerge from understanding SYMBOLS.

Interactionist sociology examines human behavior at the individual (micro) level as opposed to the level of social institutions (macro). The Interactionist perspective is sometimes called social psychology.

W.I. Thomas: "If men (sic) define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."

Interactionist view of PEOPLE:

> - People are, essentially, rational, thinking, and orderly.

> - What people do, and how they do it, depends on circumstances.

> - People use SYMBOLS to communicate; symbols have meanings that people come to accept and share. eg., the flag, a funeral procession, the star-spangled banner. Symbols and rituals cause people to interact in prescribed and even predictable ways.

Interactionist view of SOCIETY:

> - How people share their understanding of symbols is what makes a social context. For example, we have all learned what is appropriate behavior when a band plays the Star-Spangled Banner.

> - Society is artificial. Individuals construct their definition of the world depending on their situation. Situations define the nature of our relationship to what others call "institutions." For example, one's view of the health care system has much to do with one's age and income.

> - "Institutions" are concepts we keep in our heads, but don't act on very much. A "micro-sociologist" wouldn't study a balance sheet to determine how healthy a business was. He or she would talk to the people on the assembly line.

Ascribed status: Woman

Achieved status set:	**Role Expectations:**
Researcher	Laboratory role
	Author role
Wife	Nurturer role
	Supporting role
Teacher	Instructional role
	Collegial role
Mother	Maternal role
	Civic role

Try It

In order to practice some interesting Social Psychology, you might consider trying one or more of the following exercises. They are designed to either gauge the depth of social rules, or to alter your own subjective reality.

Breaching Experiments designed to gauge the depth of social rules:

1. Go into McDonalds (or any such place); tell the clerk all you have is a quarter. See if he or she will be willing to sell you a cup of coffee for that price. Use whatever powers of persuasion or sad story you can think of. (You might try this experiment twice. First, go dressed as you might expect one would if all you really had was a quarter. Then, try it somewhere else while wearing whatever equivalent of "your Sunday Best" that you have available or are comfortable wearing. Notice any different reactions.)
2. Wear to a class whatever is your wardrobe's equivalent of a business suit.
3. Get to a class early and sit where someone else who you don't know, usually sits.
4. Go through the "cash only" line at the grocery store. Try to pay with a check; take no money with you.
5. Walk up the "down" staircase for a day. Watch how people react to you.
6. Get on an elevator and instead of facing the door, face the other people on the elevator.

Exercises in altering your subjective reality:

1. Buy an outfit at the Salvation Army Thrift Store and wear it for a whole day.

2. If it is not ordinarily your custom, do some grocery shopping after midnight.

3. If you have never done so, go online and start the process by which you have to apply for food stamps. Imagine what feels like to feed your kids that way. After you've been abandoned or evicted lets say.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY GROUPS

Primary group characteristics:

- Small number of people
- Involves whole self
- Personal
- Continuous interaction
- Long duration
- Informal expectations
- Informally imposed sanctions

Examples:

- Family
- Clique
- Work group
- Neighborhood
- Friendship group

Secondary group characteristics:

- Large number of people
- Involves parts of life
- Impersonal
- Sporadic interaction
- Short duration
- Formal expectations
- Formal sanctions

Examples:

- Labor union
- College or college class
- Military unit
- Corporation
- Police force

SOCIAL DEVIANCE

Deviance and Deviants: Basic definition and introductory concepts:

Social control. Family. The Police. Government and Military

   informal social control and informal sanctions (The LOOK)

   formal social control (The LAW)

Why is there deviance in society?

Functionalist view: Deviance is *useful.* My Dad: "We can always use you for a bad example."

Conflict perspective: Deviance is *inevitable.* (When playing by the rules doesn't help).

   The rich get richer and the poor get prison.

   Fear and the police

Crime
   Index crimes

   Professional Crime

   Organized Crime

   White collar crime

Case study: Campus Carry and Gun Violence