The Sociological Paradox

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http://www.public.iastate.edu/~soc.134
“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’”

(Speech at the March on Washington, August 28, 1963)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Civil Rights Leader. American Hero. Sociology Major (Morehouse College, 1948)

Make a Difference. Study Sociology.
Individuals and society

Society
- Socialization
- Social Control
- Stratification
- Ideology

Everyday Interactions

Social Movements

Individuals
Individuals and society

✓ Socialization: process through which one learns how to act according to the rules and expectations of a particular culture (p. 135)

✓ Social control: various means by which a society encourages conformity to its rules and expectations

✓ Stratification: ranking system for groups of people that perpetuates unequal rewards and life chances in society (p. 327)

✓ Ideology: coherent system of beliefs, values and ideas (p. 515)

✓ Social movement: continuous, large-scale, organized collective action motivated by the desire to enact, stop, or reverse change in some area of society (p. 512)
Sociologist: Michelle Wolkomir

Research question: How do gay Christian men change their ideology in support groups?

Method: Participant observation of gay and ex-gay Christian men, who held ideological belief that homosexuality & Christianity aren’t compatible

- One group (“Accept”) attempted to convince participants that it was okay to be Christians and practicing gay men
- The other group (“Expell”) attempted to convince participants that it was okay to be ex-gay Christian men (that the gay desires they were struggling with were no worse with other sinful desires)
Since participants in both groups believed in the authority of the Bible, group facilitators attempted to convince them that traditional Christian beliefs about homosexuality were faulty human interpretations of the Bible.

The groups also had to construct a new ideology to take the place of the old one:

- Accept drew on social justice and the idea that “God loves everyone” to create an affirming ideology.
- Expell drew on pop psychology and 12-step groups to define homosexuality as a curable psychological disorder.

Conclusions:

- Changing ideology is not easy since it is incorporated in people’s identities.
- Ideological revision can expand culture and produce social change.
Everyday interactions & love

✓ Sociologist: David Grazian
✓ Research question: Why and how do college men engage in “girl hunting”? 
✓ Method: Student self-reports
✓ Although “girl hunting” (aggressively seeking out female partners in dance clubs and other venues at night) is a central activity of college men, it isn’t a very good strategy for finding sexual partners
Grazian claims that girl hunting is not primarily about generating sexual relationships, but about men acting out their masculinity for other men.

- As men prepare for the girl-hunting ritual, their conversation strengthens their belief in the fantasy of the one-night stand and builds confidence in their own masculinity and sexual prowess.
- During the girl hunt, men perform their masculinity in front of other men; this doesn’t require success with a woman, but enthusiasm in pursuing them.
- The entire group of men shares in the success of any of its members.

One result of this ritual is supporting an ideology of male dominance and female passivity (despite evidence to the contrary).
Social movements & love

✔ Sociologist: Joel Best
✔ Research question: How did stalking become seen as a social problem?
✔ Method: Analysis of media reports
✔ People following other people is not a new behavior. However, “stalking” didn’t become a crime until the 1990s
✔ Stalking became an issue due to media coverage of the 1989 murder of actress Rebecca Schaeffer by an obsessed fan
✔ The first definition of stalking focused on “star-stalking”; the California law against stalking was supported by the Screen Actors Guild
✔ However, anti-domestic violence groups took ownership of stalking, defined it as a form of domestic violence and claimed that it was common
✔ Conclusion: the creation of “stalking,” like other social problems, was the result of interaction between social movements (domestic violence opponents), media, experts, and the government
Two insights of sociology

The social construction of reality: process through which members of a society discover, make known, reaffirm, and alter a collective version of facts, knowledge and “truth” (chapter 3)

The sociological imagination: the ability to see the impact of social forces on our private lives (p. 8)
"The facets of contemporary history are also the facets about the success and failure of individual men and women. When a society is industrialized, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes rise or fall, a man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a man takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father. Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.

"Yet [people] do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradiction. The well-being they enjoy, they do not usually impute to the big ups and downs of the societies in which they live. Seldom aware of the intricate patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary [people] do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of [people] they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of [people] and society, of biography and history, of self and world. They cannot cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them…

"What they need… is a quality of mind that will help them to use information and develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality… [that] may be called the sociological imagination."

—C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination