Thinking Like a Sociologist

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As I reflect on what I have learned throughout the last two months, it has opened my eyes to how and why sociologists think the way that they do. Starting with the sociological imagination and the meaning behind it with C. Wright Mills, expanding his ideas on why it can be positive and negative. Comparing my own life experiences to the geographic area I grew up in as well as my social position, and how it influenced and shaped my life growing up. Leading off that to discussing concepts and how they relate to each other. Ending with discussing a breaching experiment.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

In order to think like a sociologist, it involves examining many different forces around an individual rather than looking within. To dig deeper into this we must understand the sociological imagination and what it uses as well as C. Wright Mills and how his work relates to such. To compare myself and my social contexts in order to understand sociology as a whole and how certain aspects have shaped my life. To look further into a breaching experiment and the norms of society being broken and how it influences reactions from others.

First and foremost, the sociological imagination according to Conley and Dalton (2020:6) "is the ability to see connections between our personal experiences and the larger forces of history." It involves using historical forces, social forces as well as personal experiences and to find a connection between them. C. Wright Mills describes the sociological imagination in Conley and Dalton to be a "terrible lesson" by stating the following: " The terrible part of the lesson is to make our own lives ordinary- that is, to see our intensely personal, private experience of life as typical of the period and place in which we live" (2020:7). Mills then goes on to say how it can be a "magnificent" by providing comfort by stating in Conley and Dalton the following: " This can also serve as a source of comfort, however, helping us realize we are not alone in our experiences, whether they involve our orientation from the increasingly dog-eat-dog capitalism of modern American, the peculiar combination of intimacy and dissociation that we may experiences on the internet, or the ways that nationally or geography affect our life choices" (2020:7). This can be unsettling because it demonstrates how we are more similar in more ways than one. Making it harder to make a life truly different from others. On the other hand, it can

be empowering because it shows us that we are not alone during the process and everyone goes through it.

Furthermore, I am going to discuss how my social context, in comparison to King, has shaped my life experiences and opportunities. The first example will include how he discusses as well as I will be discussing, the location of where we grew up and how it affected/ shaped us. As King stated, ".. and I already understood in many ways this place was a particular social context shaping my perspectives and opportunities." To expand, I grew up in Marshall County, Kentucky. If you know anything about it, it is to no surprise to hear that I was sheltered. Although I did not see that at the time, which I will further explain later on. The county is built on religion, race and class. If you were not a Christan, white-orientated family that had money, you were not important. The county is small, everybody knows everybody, and with that you could not do anything without someone in your family finding out. It made it to where growing up made me feel like I was inside a box, and every corner was a dead end. The area itself had plenty of jobs, but mainly just fast food, so wherever you went, someone you knew was working there. It is a small town that made it impossible to truly grow as a person without being 99% biased.

A second way in which my social context shaped my experiences would be my social position, in particular race. With that , it is important to note that it was rare, I mean rare, to see or go to school with a person of color. In comparison, King (2017) stated, "Growing up in this area, I noticed that I was surrounded almost exclusively by people who looked and acted like me." We both grew up in areas where we were surrounded by people of our same ethnicity, and I am sure just like him, it was rare to see someone of a different race. To give a numeric look,

according to the U.S Census Bureau, in Marshall County white people make up 97.7%, whereas African Americans make up 0.5%. As a result, I had opinions that were not of my own but of everyone else due to the low rates of ethnicity. With that, I did not realize how this sheltered me until I went to Western Kentucky University. There, my eyes were opened to everything. The groups of people fighting for black lives was something I had not experienced due to my biased town. I had to learn what was appropriate to say and not say because in my town, it was the social norm, but there, that was not the case. I look back on my experience and reflect as being thankful to see that what I learned as a child was not right and it taught me right from wrong in this world where I would not always be surrounded by people the same color as me.

SOCIALIZATION AND SOCIAL CONTROL

To introduce this section on breaching experiments, I am going to discuss familiar concepts and how they relate to one another. According to Conley and Dalton (2020: A7) Norm is defined as, " how values tell us to behave." In other words, how our beliefs we hold close to use reflect our actions on how much we either value or devalue them. This can be embedded in our brain, through example, religion. A value we could hold close to us through religion could be, honoring your mother and father. So throughout life, we behave kindly to them and treat them with respect. Socialization according to Conley and Dalton (2020: 124) is defined as, " the process by which individuals internalize the values, beliefs, and norms of a given society and learn to function as members of that society." I would like to emphasize *that society,* each society represents different values, beliefs and norms, and what is considered "normal" in one society, may not be the case in another. So through code switching we adapt to these values so we can function respectfully in that society. Deviance on the other hand, according to LibreTexts,

“ describes actions or behaviors that violate informal social norms or formally-enacted rules.” This is where the norms of a certain society are gone against, this can be for example, spitting in public. It can be considered disrespectful and gross. Sanctions, according to Britannica, is “ a reaction by members of a social group indicating approval or disapproval of a mode of conduct and serving to enforce behavioral standards of the group.” With that, if you conduct deviant behavior then members of that society will have a disapproving reaction- such as a gasp or look on their face if you for example, spit in public. Overall, these concepts relate/ compare to one another because it shows how society views behaviors; what is acceptable versus unacceptable.

Instead of conducting an experiment, I watched video number two, and the norm that was broken was opening the door for people that are far away. The typical rule is holding the door open for the person if they are a few feet behind you, not far away. I learned to follow this norm by observing others as well as being told to do so. An agent of socialization that was involved would be my parents. My dad in particular taught me to hold the door open, especially for older people. I was explicitly taught to follow it, but I know if I wasn’t taught I would still follow it. The breaching experiment in the video involved a man holding the door open for students at a University who were far away. When I was watching the video, it gave me anxiety just because I know how I would feel if I was a bystander and that happened to me. Personally, I would be too scared to do an experiment like this, I don’t think I could take it seriously as well as the fear of people getting mad I held it open too long. The reactions from others were about the same, the majority of people were surprised and they put a pep in their step to hurry up and get to the door. Saving face was done in one instance in particular. The man holding the door started cheering for the people running to the door. It showed that he was familiarizing them running in

correlation with him holding the door. For me personally, I already took this norm seriously. I almost always hold the door open for people, at times they can be a certain further distance and I wait, simply out of respect. Overall this experiment was useful in determining if people are respectful enough to hold open a door for people far away or not. It was logical in a sense to see if others reacted rudely or kindly for the man being generous enough to hold open the door. It was reasonable just for the sake of the experiment, maybe not in everyday life though. It was not unnecessary due to the experiments sake as well

To conclude, we closely looked at how the sociological imagination uses different forces in comparison to our everyday lives. We examined how Mills finds it to be a comfort as well as being terrible. Comparing my social position and geographic region in where I lived that shaped my experiences with how sheltered I was as well as a culture shock when entering college. Ending with the breaching experiment that was conducted of holding a door open for people that are far away and concluding that the experiment was logical and reasonable.

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