I. What is Social Structure?

Social structure refers to patterns around which society is organized. Henslin (1999:96) defines social structure as "the framework of society that was already laid out before you were born." Social mobility is often achieved by routes provided by the social structure. In a bureaucracy, the patterns are well defined (in the army one moves up in rank).

There are micro aspects of social structure such as statuses and roles. Larger social structures include groups and institutions (e.g., government, education, religion). Still larger are more obscure structures, (like those related to the economy). Often, ordinary people are not even aware of their existence. These obscure structures none-the-less have great impact on the character of society overall.

Macro vs. Micro Approaches to Sociology

The micro-level refers to social relations that involve direct social interaction with others including families, friends, and coworkers. Symbolic Interactionist Theory explore micro-sociological issues.

- An example would be Liebow and Anderson's study of how street corner men in Washington coped with life on a day-to-day basis.

The macro-level refers to the larger, more invisible, and often more remote social processes that help to shape the micro world. Macro processes include political, economic, cultural, and other institutional social forces (Appelbaum and Chambliss, 1997:6). Functionalists and Conflict Theory are the domain of macro-level studies.

- Karl Marx's concern with social class is an example of macro sociology

II. Micro Sociology: Roles, Status, and Expectations

Henslin (1999:95-97) draws a distinction between status and roles. Status refers to the social positions that exist in society while roles refer to "expected" patterns of behavior, obligations, and privileges attached to a particular social status. Associated with each role (or social position) are many expectations concerning how a person should behave.

Expectations are like norms. Viewing life simply in terms of roles that people occupy, one begins to see all life as if it were a stage play. Shakespeare said in "As You Like It":

All the world is a stage and all the men and women merely players They have their exits and their entrances And one man in his time plays many parts

To act in a role is simply to act according to the norms (rules) and expectations attached to it.
A. Ascribed Status Vs. Achieved Status

Henslin (1999:96) calls attention to the distinction between ascribed status and achieved status.

Ascribed statuses are involuntary. One is born with ascribed status such as race or sex. Age is also an ascribed status.

Achieved status, on the other hand, is earned. It is based on merit.

B. Role Distancing and Role Conflict

Unlike a stage play, however, we do not define roles. We negotiate social roles.

1. Role Distancing

When an individual disagrees with the expectations associated with a particular role, the individual may try to de-emphasize the importance of that role. Irving Goffman (1961) calls this "role distancing." Role distancing is the act of separating oneself from the role. For example, the actor may only play the role in a tongue and cheek fashion.

2. Role Conflict

Some roles that have to be played contradict other important roles (See Henslin, 1999:108). Here the individual does not know what is expected. We call this "role conflict."

Example:
The conflict experienced between having to be a mother and having to be a wage earner simultaneously.

Example:
Teenagers often experience conflict between the role of child and that of adult.

C. Expectations and Inequality: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Henslin (481:1999) contends that a self-fulfilling prophecy refers to a false assumption of what is going on that happens to come true simply because it was predicted.

Example: A rumor spreads that a bank is in trouble and that depositors will not be able to get their money. As a result of the rumor, depositors rush to the bank to get their money. The initial rumor was false, but now it may be true that depositors can't get
The self-fulfilling prophecy helps maintain and perpetuate inequality on a societal level. If a society holds negative expectations toward a particular group of people (e.g., the group is expected to perform in a sub par fashion), that group may internalize these expectations. Literally, they may begin to behave according to the expectations (see Henslin, 1999:323). Negative behavior will, in turn, provide justifications for a dominant group to continue a policy of disrespect. Social structure helps in the formation and maintenance of expectations for both parties.

The Zimbardo study and the Rosenhan experiment highlight the "self-fulfilling prophecy." If one expects a certain kind of behavior from an individual, one may unconsciously create the conditions that fulfill expectations. For example, an athlete who thinks he is a loser, seldom wins. However, an athlete who believes that he is a winner tends to win (all other things held equal).

Social Interaction in Everyday Life

Ethnomethodology

Andersen & Taylor (2001:94) contend that one way to study norms is to observe what happens when norms are violated. Ethnomethodology is a technique for studying human interaction by deliberately disrupting social norms and observing how individuals respond. The idea is that the disruption of social norms helps one discover the normal social order.

Impression Management and the Dramaturgy Model

Andersen & Taylor (2001:95-6) contends that impression management is a process by which people control how other will perceive them.

For example, a student who hands in a term paper late will try to convince the professor that he or she is really a very diligent individual, but that, due to circumstances beyond their control, they could not get the paper in on time.

For example, before one goes to a job interview, they may buy new closes and have their hair cut. By going to a job interview well-groomed, the prospective employee is trying to let their future boss know that they will be a great employee (Henslin, 2004:97).

Irving Goffman argued that social interaction is a series of attempts by one person to
con the other. Goffman would argue that trying to find ways to con other is at the heart of social interaction. While this view may be a bit melodramatic, one should agree that we do present ourselves differently depending of the situation. One responds differently to their mother when compared to a date. Goffman contends that the various settings, are like stages where we give performances.

The dramaturgical model of social interaction assumes that "people are actors on a stage in the drama of everyday life" (2001:96).

III. The Power of Roles

A. The Zimbardo Study

The Zimbardo study (1971) (also called the Stanford Prison Study) considers the behavior of mature, stable, intelligent, middle-class college students who were asked to play roles. Twenty-four students were paid $15 dollars a day.

The 24 students were randomly assigned to two groups. Half were asked to play the role of prison guards. The other half were asked to play the role of prisoners.

Once groups assignments were made, the Palo Alto police literally arrested the students, whom Zimbardo defined as prisoners. They put them through the whole incarceration process as if they were real prisoners (e.g., the were picked up, booked, finger printed, and placed in a holding cell). At this point the "prisoners" were blind folded, their cloths were taken from them, and they were transported to Zimbardo's labs at Stanford. At this point the "guards" of Zimbardo's project took over (Zimbardo, 1971).

The student-guards were told that they had to make the student-prisoners loose their since of identity (e.g., college student) and accept their new identity as prisoner. Guards could not physically mistreat the student-prisoners, but they could intimidate. They were also given symbols of power and oppression such as billy-clubs. The prisoners arrived at "jail" with chains on their feet. They were often asked to strip and in the process guards would humiliate the prisoners. They would wake up prisoners at odd times (like 2:30 am) for cell searches (Zimbardo, 1971).

Within a few days the students internalized their roles. Charon (1986:173) contends the situation became so nightmarish that the study came to an early end. On the second day of the study, the prisoners protested and as punishment guards took away their beds. Other student-prisoners who didn't follow the rules were placed in "the hole" which was an area used for solitary confinement. Going to the bathroom became a privilege for the model prisoners.

According to Zimbardo, "There were dramatic changes in virtually every aspect of their behavior, thinking, and feeling. We saw some boys (guards) treat other as if they were despicable animals. Those playing prison guards took pleasure with inflicting cruelty. The other boys (prisoners) became servile, dehumanized robots who thought only of escaping, of their own individual survival, and of their
mounting hatred for the guards" (see Charon, 1986:174). Zimbardo (1971) noted that some prisoners attempted to fake insanity in an effort to be removed from the experiment. In the case of one young man, the prisoner appeared to actually "loose it."

B. The Rosenhan Study

The Rosenhan study highlights the power of roles also. Expectations associated with roles and statuses are also highlighted. The Rosenhan study shows that when an individual is "labeled" or defined are occupying a certain role by society. Altering the perceptions of others is very difficult.

Master Status

Master Status is a label that supersedes all other labels (Henslin, 1999:96).

Rosenhan notes that often there is only a loose association between the person labeled mentally ill and the actual act. Often the label or status that we impose upon others becomes the primary tool for knowing how to respond to other individual. To put it in other words, if we see a person in a given role, certain expectations accompany that role. It becomes very difficult for ordinary people to "know an individual" outside those perceptions and expectations.

To demonstrate this point, Rosenhan asked: "what would happen if sane people sought admission to a psychiatric hospital?" To explore this question, several of his graduate students went to psychiatric hospitals complaining of hearing voices. Professional staff diagnosed all as having mental disorders. All the students were admitted to the psychiatric hospitals. After their admission, however, they stopped displaying all inappropriate behavior (i.e., hearing voices). Their goal after admission was to convince the staff that they were sane.

Hospital staff diagnosed most of the pseudo patients as schizophrenic. The graduate students were hospitalized for an average of nineteen days. The staff never did realize that the pseudo patients were frauds. Other patients, however, did realize. 35 of 118 "real" patients expressed suspicions like: "You're not crazy, You're journalist or protesters" or "Your checking up on the hospital."

Apparently, once they stuck the label on the patient, nothing the pseudo patient could do would change the expectations of the professional staff. Rosenhan notes that in all likelihood some of the professional staff also realized that Rosenhan's students were not really "sick," but said nothing in order to save face.

In the second part of the experiment Rosenhan informed the hospitals that they could expect one or more pseudo patient to enter their hospital. Of 193 patients who were admitted, forty-one were alleged to be pseudo patients by at least one hospital's staff. In reality, no pseudo patients were admitted.

IV. Macro Sociology: Institutions

- Family, religion, and politics are examples of institutions (Henslin, 2004:83).
• **Institutions (in Charon, 1986:229)** are structures that define the right and correct ways of doing things in society.

• **Institutions help establish and maintain social order.**

• Social institutions shape our behavior (Henslin, 2004:83).

• Social institutions are the means that each society develops to meet its basic needs (Henslin, 2004:83).

• Institutions act as norms.

• Institutions tend to support the ideology of a society. For example, the educational system (as well as the rest of the institutions) in America support the ideology of democracy and free enterprise.

• As society becomes more industrialized, institutions become more formal (Henslin, 2004:83).

**A. Institutions vs. Organization**

Institutions can be organization, but they are different from organizations. Public education is an institution. El Paso Community college is an organization. GM is an organization. The "corporation" is an institution. Often one hears mental hospitals or prisons called institutions. One hears of people being institutionalized. The specific hospital is not an institution, speaking sociologically. The mental health system is an institution. If one is institutionalized, he or she becomes a part of a particular system of organization. The idea of prison, however, is an institution. The same idea holds no matter what prison in which an individual is.

**V. Structure Below the Surface**

Essentialism is an idea that comes out of the French Structuralist School of Althusser and Foucoul. Essentialism generally refers to social structures that lie below the surface of observable society. According to Sartre, essentialists are concerned with the unconsciousness foundations of human culture. For essentialists the descriptive level (what people see) is only one of appearance and not cause. Cause is hidden. To understand society, one needs to go beyond description (the surface) to the causal level. The characteristics of the economy determines what we see on the surface (in government, size of family, type of profession, major concerns of criminal justice, etc.)

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