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Social Organization

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 4 examines two connected questions in sociology: First, how do we establish/create our own personal identities? Who are we anyways? Second, how do our identities affect the social groups we belong to and the things that we do? The functionalist view provides us with a macro-sociological view on statuses and roles. Where statuses are the social positions people hold, and roles dictate the behaviours, responsibilities, and privileges that come with the status.

The symbolic interactionist perspective has much to offer on this subject. Like its name suggests, interaction is the primary aspect to the theories of roles and our concept of the self, and individual identity. On the topic of roles, symbolic interactionists present two key concepts: role-taking and role-making. The former is understood as us taking on the roles of the other in order to co-ordinate our actions, while the latter is the process where we modify or adjust our roles in order to fit the situation at hand.

Understanding roles, symbolic interaction allows us to understand more fully the concepts of our “self” and “identity.” Within the self, we are made up of the “I” and “Me.” This allows us to see ourselves as both a subject and object. Our identity, on the other hand, is the names that we give ourselves or use to announce to others who we are. Identity is subsequently based on several things, varying from impression management, role performance, and identity work, to key differences between social versus personal identities. With continued increase in social media and technology, the line between the social self and personal self is not as easy to delineate as it was in the past.

In order for society to function, we have to operate within groups. These include various sets of people organized as categories, networks, communities, groups, organizations, and cliques. Each of

these is structured differently and participating within these social organizations influences individual behaviour.

This chapter will also introduce you to bureaucracies, the big companies and organizations that we have come to know—ones that employ a significant amount of people and operate on a major level. Subsequently, bureaucracies are the most successful form of organization. The authors trace the roots of the modern bureaucracy from the rise of industrialization, capitalism, and state-building. Bureaucracies also have several characteristics that make them different from the other types of groups. For example, unlike the others, they have a division of labour, clear hierarchy of positions, formal system of rules, a reliance on written documents, and protection of careers. Understanding how bureaucracies actually function is a key focus for many sociologists due to the importance of them in regulating the social world.

KEY TERMS

Category	Impression management	Role strain
Community	Organization	Self
Group	Roles	Social forms
Identity	Role conflict	Status
Identity work	Role performance	Status set

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. According to Mead, what are the “I” and “Me” made up of? (p. 84)
2. What are the differences between achieved and ascribed statuses? Provide an example of each. (p. 82)
3. What is Merton’s “bureaucratic personality”? (p. 97)
4. Can an individual hold many statuses simultaneously? If so, explain using an example. (p. 82)
5. Social life is not well understood in terms of networks. This is because networks lack which three key characteristics? (p. 90)
6. What is the difference between role conflict and role strain? Provide an example of each. (p. 83)
7. How can there be a gap between the roles we play (social identity) and who we understand ourselves to be (personal identity)? (p. 86)
8. How do we become aware of our authentic self? (p. 86)
9. How might turning points affect identity and status? (p. 87)
10. What makes groups distinct forms of social networks? (p. 92)

READINGS AND WEBSITES

Albas, Daniel, and Cheryl Albas (1984). *Student Life and Exams: Coping Strategies*. Kendall/Hunt. See also (for overhead notes and self-test questions):

<http://www.sociologicalimagination.net/soci1001/overheads/overheads10/img2.html>

Albas and Albas's book examines the concept of university students' lives, specifically how exams affect them and their ways of dealing with exams. Their concepts of the "Aces and Bombers" are established here. From a symbolic interactionist perspective the authors also discuss on our status, student roles, and identity affect the way we approach tests and exams, along with the constant adjustments we have to make to others in their perceptions of us.

Scott, John (2000). *Social Network Analysis: A Handbook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Scott's book is a must read for anyone wishing to start research in an increasingly important social sciences subject in today's era of globalization and information technology. Scott provides the basic fundamental assumptions, theories, and framework for which to begin such an analysis. The second edition also provides the reader greater depth into the terms used by social network theorists, along with examples on how to analyze the data using the program designed for network analysis; UCI Net.

Bauwens, Michel, Silke Helfrich, and David Bollier. (2017). *Commons Strategy Group*. [Website]. Retrieved from <http://commonsstrategies.org/about/>

Through new forms of technology, "commons" continue to develop to support various types of businesses, activism, research, and community activities (both online and off).

Community Research Canada. (2017). *Community Based Research*. [Website]. Retrieved from <https://communityresearchcanada.ca/>

This website contains resources for people who support and have an interest in community based research in Canada.

Turkle, Sherry. (2017). *Technology and the Self*. Retrieved from <http://sherryturkle.com>

This is the website of Sherry Turkle, director of MIT's Initiative on Technology and the Self, a centre for research on how technology affects our self-explorations and social encounters.