

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND INTERACTION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

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Changing Social Structure and Interaction in the Future



I BEGAN DUMPSTER DIVING [scavenging in a large garbage bin] about a year before I became homeless. . . . The area I frequent is inhabited by many affluent college students. I am not here by chance; the Dumpsters in this area are very rich. Students throw out many good things, including food. In particular they tend to throw everything out when they move at the end of a semester, before and after breaks, and around midterm, when many of them despair of college. So I find it advantageous to keep an eye on the academic calendar. I learned to scavenge gradually, on my own. Since then I have initiated several companions into the trade. I have learned that there is a predictable series of stages a person goes through in learning to scavenge.

At first the new scavenger is filled with disgust and self-loathing. He is ashamed of being seen and may lurk around, trying to duck behind things, or he may dive at night. (In fact, most people instinctively look away from a scavenger. By skulking around, the novice calls attention to himself and arouses suspicion. Diving at night is ineffective and needlessly messy.) . . . That stage passes with experience. The scavenger finds a pair of running shoes that fit and look and smell brand-new. . . . He begins to understand: People throw away perfectly good stuff, a lot of perfectly good stuff.

At this stage, Dumpster shyness begins to dissipate. The diver, after all, has the last laugh. He is finding all manner of good things that are his for the taking. Those who disparage his profession are the fools, not he.

—AUTHOR LARS EIGHNER recalling his experiences as a Dumpster diver while living under a shower curtain in a stand of bamboo in a public park. Eighner became homeless when he was evicted from his “shack” after being unemployed for about a year. (Eighner, 1993: 111–119)

Eighner’s “diving” activities reflect a specific pattern of social behavior. All activities in life—including scavenging in garbage bins and living “on the streets”—are social in nature. Homeless persons and domiciled persons (those with homes) live in social worlds that have predictable patterns of social interaction. **Social interaction is the process by which people act toward or respond to other people** and is the foundation for all relationships and groups in society. In this chapter, we look at the relationship between social structure and social interaction. In the process, homelessness is used as an example of how social problems occur and may be perpetuated within social structures and patterns of interaction.

Social structure is the stable pattern of social relationships that exist within a particular group or society.

This structure is essential for the survival of society and for the well-being of individuals because it provides a social web of familial support and social relationships that connects each of us to the larger society. Many homeless people have lost this vital linkage. As a result, they often experience a loss of personal dignity and a sense of moral worth because of their “homeless” condition (Snow and Anderson, 1993).

Who are the homeless? Before reading on, take the quiz on homelessness in Box 4.1. The characteristics of the homeless population in the United States vary widely. Among the homeless are single men, single women, and families. In recent years, families have accounted for almost half of the homeless population (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1996). Further, people of color are overrepresented among the homeless. In 1996, African Americans made up 57 percent of the homeless population, whites (Caucasians) 30 percent, Latinas/os (Hispanics) 10 per-



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cent, Native Americans 2 percent, and Asian Americans 1 percent (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1996). These percentages obviously vary across communities and different areas of the country.

Homeless persons come from all walks of life. They include aliens, parolees, runaway youths and children, Vietnam veterans, the elderly, and former flower children. They live in cities, suburbs, and rural areas (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1996). Contrary to popular myths, most of the homeless are not on the streets by choice or because they were deinstitutionalized by mental hospitals. Not all of the homeless are unemployed. About 20 percent of homeless people hold full- or part-time jobs but earn too little to find an affordable place to live (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1996).

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

CHAPTER FOCUS QUESTION: How is homelessness related to the social structure of a society?

What are the components of social structure?

How do societies maintain social solidarity and continue to function in times of rapid change?

Why do societies have shared patterns of social interaction?

How are daily interactions similar to being onstage?

Do positive changes in society occur through individual efforts or institutional efforts?

SOCIAL STRUCTURE: THE MACROLEVEL PERSPECTIVE

Social structure provides the framework within which we interact with others. This framework is an orderly, fixed arrangement of parts that together make up the whole group or society (see Figure 4.1). At the macrolevel, the social structure of a society has several essential elements: social institutions, groups, statuses, roles, and norms.

Functional theorists emphasize that social structure is essential because it creates order and predictability in a society (Parsons, 1951). Social structure is also important for our human development. As we saw in Chapter 3, we develop a self-concept as we learn the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the people around us. When these attitudes and values are part of a predictable structure, it is easier to develop that self-concept.

Social structure gives us the ability to interpret the social situations we encounter. For example, we expect our families to care for us, our schools to educate us, and our police to protect us. When our circumstances change dramatically, most of us feel an acute sense of anxiety because we do not know what to expect or what is expected of us. For example, newly homeless individuals may feel disoriented because they do not know how to function in their new setting. The person is likely to wonder, “How will I survive on the streets?” and “Where do I go to get help?” Social structure helps people make sense out of their environment, even when they find themselves on the streets.

In addition to providing a map for our encounters with others, social structure may limit our options and place us in arbitrary categories not of our own choosing. Conflict theorists maintain that there is more to the social structure than is readily visible and that we must explore the deeper, underlying structures that determine so-



BOX 4.1 SOCIOLOGY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT HOMELESS PERSONS?

TRUE FALSE

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| T | F | 1. Many homeless people choose to be homeless. |
| T | F | 2. Homelessness is largely a self-inflicted condition. |
| T | F | 3. Homeless people do not work. |
| T | F | 4. Most homeless people are mentally ill. |
| T | F | 5. Homeless people typically panhandle (beg for money) so that they can buy alcohol or drugs. |
| T | F | 6. Most homeless people are heavy drug users. |
| T | F | 7. A large number of homeless persons are dangerous. |
| T | F | 8. Homeless persons have existed throughout the history of the United States. |
| T | F | 9. One out of every four homeless persons is a child. |
| T | F | 10. Some homeless people have attended college and graduate school. |

Answers on page 102.

cial relations in a society. Karl Marx suggested that the way economic production is organized is the most important structural aspect of any society. In capitalistic societies, where a few people control the labor of many, the social structure reflects a system of relationships of domination among categories of people (for example, owner-worker and employer-employee).

Social structure creates boundaries that define which persons or groups will be the “insiders” and which will be the “outsiders.” *Social marginality* is the state of being part insider and part outsider in the social structure. Sociologist Robert Park (1928) coined this term to refer to persons (such as immigrants) who simultaneously share the life and traditions of two distinct groups. Social marginality results in stigmatization. A **stigma** is any physical or social attribute or sign that so devalues a person’s social identity that it disqualifies that person from full social acceptance (Goffman, 1963b). A convicted criminal, wearing a prison uniform, is an example of a person who has been stigmatized; the uniform says that the person has done something wrong and should not be allowed unsupervised outside the prison walls.

COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The social structure of a society includes its social positions, the relationships among those positions, and the kinds of resources attached to each of the positions. Social structure also includes all of the groups that make up society and the relationships among those groups (Smelser, 1988). We begin by examining the social positions that are closest to the individual.

Status

A **status** is a socially defined position in a group or society characterized by certain expectations, rights, and duties. Statuses exist independently of the specific people occupying them (Linton, 1936); the statuses of professional athlete, rock musician, professor, college student, and homeless person all exist exclusive of the specific individuals who occupy these social positions. For example, although thousands of new students arrive on



BOX 4.1 SOCIOLOGY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

ANSWERS TO THE SOCIOLOGY QUIZ ON HOMELESS PERSONS

1. **False.** Less than 6 percent of all homeless people are that way by choice.
2. **False.** Most homeless persons did not inflict upon themselves the conditions that produced their homelessness. Some are the victims of child abuse or violence.
3. **False.** Many homeless people are among the working poor. Minimum wage jobs do not pay enough for an individual to support a family or pay inner-city rent.
4. **False.** Most homeless people are not mentally ill; estimates suggest that about one-fourth of the homeless are emotionally disturbed.
5. **False.** Many homeless persons panhandle to pay for food, a bed at a shelter, or other survival needs.
6. **False.** Most homeless people are not heavy drug users. Estimates suggest that about one-fourth of the homeless are substance abusers. Many of these are part of the same one-fourth of the homeless who are mentally ill.
7. **False.** Although an encounter with a homeless person occasionally ends in tragedy, most homeless persons are among the least threatening members of society. They are often the victims of crime, not the perpetrators.
8. **True.** Scholars have found that homelessness has always existed in the United States. However, the number of homeless persons has increased or decreased with fluctuations in the national economy. In the past, individuals without homes were referred to as “hobos,” “tramps,” and “vagrants”; today, they are lumped into the category of “homeless.”
9. **True.** Families with children are the fastest growing category of homeless persons in the United States. The number of such families nearly doubled between 1984 and 1989, and continues to do so. Many homeless children are alone. They may be runaways or “throwaways” whose parents do not want them to return home.
10. **True.** Some homeless persons have attended college and graduate school. Many have completed high school.

Sources: Based on Kroloff, 1993; Liebow, 1993; and Snow and Anderson, 1993.

college campuses each year to occupy the status of first-year student, the status of college student and the expectations attached to that position remained relatively unchanged for most of the twentieth century.

Does the term *status* refer only to high-level positions in society? No, not in a sociological sense. Although many people equate the term *status* with high levels of prestige, sociologists use it to refer to *all* socially defined positions—high-rank and low-rank.

Take a moment to answer the question “Who am I?” To determine who you are, you must think about your social identity, which is derived from

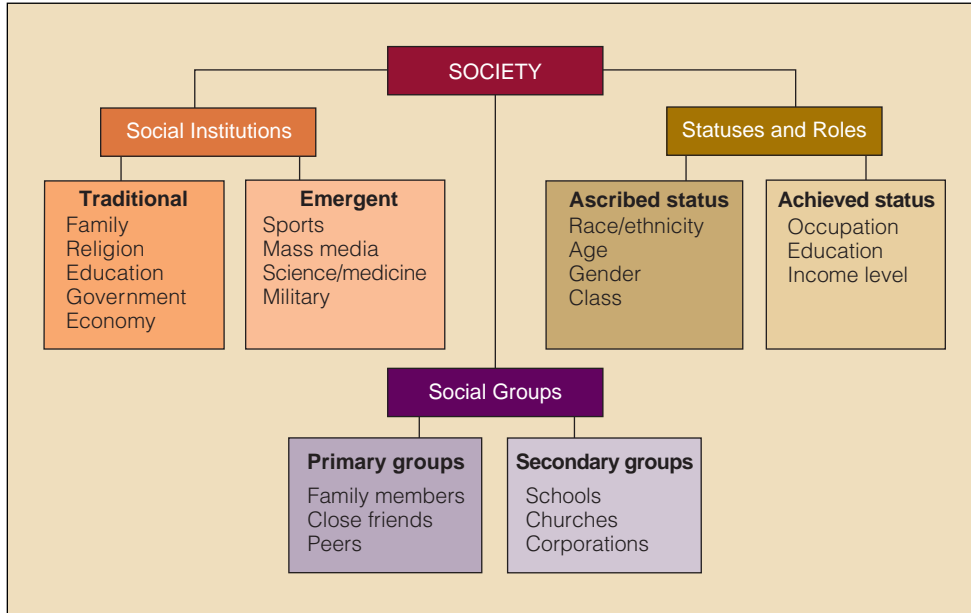
the statuses you occupy and is based on your status set. A **status set is made up of all the statuses that a person occupies at a given time.** For example, Maria may be a psychologist, a professor, a wife, a mother, a Catholic, a school volunteer, a Texas resident, and a Mexican American. All of these socially defined positions constitute her status set.

ASCRIBED AND ACHIEVED STATUS Statuses are distinguished by the manner in which we acquire them. An **ascribed status is a social position conferred at birth or received involuntarily later in life,** based on attributes over which the individual has little or no control, such as race/ethnicity, age, and

FIGURE 4.1

Social Structure Framework

Trace your life experiences through this framework. What influence have these components had on you?



gender. For example, Maria is a female born to Mexican American parents; she was assigned these statuses at birth. An **achieved status** is a social position that a person assumes voluntarily as a result of personal choice, merit, or direct effort. Achieved statuses (such as occupation, education, and income) are thought to be gained as a result of personal ability or successful competition. Most occupational positions in modern societies are achieved statuses. For instance, Maria voluntarily assumed the statuses of psychologist, professor, wife, mother, and school volunteer. However, not all achieved statuses are positions most people would want to attain; being a criminal, a drug addict, or a homeless person, for example, is a negative achieved status.

Ascribed statuses have a significant influence on the achieved statuses we occupy. Race/ethnicity, gender, and age affect each person's opportunity to acquire certain achieved statuses. Those who are privileged by their positive ascribed statuses are more likely to achieve the more presti-

gious positions in a society. Those who are disadvantaged by their ascribed statuses may more easily acquire negative achieved statuses.

MASTER STATUS If we occupy many different statuses, how can we determine which is the most important? According to sociologist Everett Hughes, societies resolve this ambiguity by determining master statuses. A **master status** is the most important status that a person occupies; it dominates all of the individual's other statuses and is the overriding ingredient in determining a person's general social position (Hughes, 1945). Being poor or rich is a master status that influences many other areas of life, including health, education, and life opportunities. Historically, the most common master statuses for women have related to positions in the family, such as daughter, wife, and mother. For men, occupation has usually been the most important status, although occupation is increasingly a master status for many women as well. "What do you do?" is one of the first questions

How does your perception of Ruth Bader Ginsberg's master status change when you compare these photographs?



many people ask when meeting each other. Occupation provides important clues to a person's educational level, income, and family background. An individual's race/ethnicity also may constitute a master status in a society in which dominant group members single out members of other groups as "inferior" on the basis of real or alleged physical, cultural, or nationality characteristics (see Feagin and Feagin, 1999).

Master statuses confer on people high or low levels of personal worth and dignity. Those are not characteristics that we inherently possess; they are derived from the statuses we occupy. For those who have no residence, being a homeless person readily becomes a master status regardless of the person's other attributes. Homelessness is a stigmatized master status that confers disrepute on its occupant because domiciled people often believe that a homeless person has a "character flaw." The circumstances under which someone becomes homeless determine the extent to which that person is stigmatized. For example, individuals who become homeless as a result of natural disasters (such as a hurricane or a brush fire) are not seen as causing their homelessness or as being a threat to the community. Thus, they are less likely to be stigmatized. However, in cases in which homeless persons are viewed as the cause of their own problems, they are more likely to be stigmatized and

marginalized by others. Snow and Anderson (1993: 199) observed the effects of homelessness as a master status:

It was late afternoon, and the homeless were congregated in front of [the Salvation Army shelter] for dinner. A school bus approached that was packed with Anglo junior high school students being bused from an eastside barrio school to their upper-middle and upper-class homes in the city's northwest neighborhoods. As the bus rolled by, a fusillade of coins came flying out the windows, as the students made obscene gestures and shouted, "Get a job." Some of the homeless gestured back, some scrambled for the scattered coins—mostly pennies—others angrily threw the coins at the bus, and a few seemed oblivious to the encounter. For the passing junior high schoolers, the exchange was harmless fun, a way to work off the restless energy built up in school; but for the homeless it was a stark reminder of their stigmatized status and of the extent to which they are the objects of negative attention.

STATUS SYMBOLS When people are proud of a particular social status they occupy, they often choose to use visible means to let others know about their

position. *Status symbols* are material signs that inform others of a person's specific status. For example, just as wearing a wedding ring proclaims that a person is married, owning a Rolls-Royce announces that one has "made it."

In our daily lives, status symbols both announce our statuses and further our interactions with others. In hospitals affiliated with medical schools, the length and color of a person's uniform coat (worn over street clothing) indicates the individual's status within the medical center. Physicians wear longer white coats, medical students wear shorter white coats, laboratory technicians wear short blue coats, and so forth.

Status symbols for the domiciled and for the homeless may have different meanings. Among affluent persons, a full shopping cart in the grocery store and bags of merchandise from expensive department stores indicate a lofty financial position. By contrast, among the homeless, bulging shopping bags and overloaded grocery carts suggest a completely different status. Carts and bags are essential to street life; there is no other place to keep things, as shown by this description of Darian, a homeless woman in New York City:

The possessions in her postal cart consist of a whole house full of things, from pots and pans to books, shoes, magazines, toilet articles, personal papers and clothing, most of which she made herself. . . .

Because of its weight and size, Darian cannot get the cart up over the curb. She keeps it in the street near the cars. This means that as she pushes it slowly up and down the street all day long, she is living almost her entire life directly in traffic. She stops off along her route to sit or sleep for awhile and to be both stared at as a spectacle and to stare back. Every aspect of her life including sleeping, eating, and going to the bathroom is constantly in public view . . . she has no space to call her own and she never has a moment's privacy. Her privacy, her home, is her cart with all its possessions. (Rousseau, 1981: 141)

For homeless women and men, possessions are not status symbols as much as they are a link with the past, a hope for the future, and a potential source

of immediate cash. As Snow and Anderson (1993: 147) note, selling personal possessions is not uncommon among most social classes; members of the working and middle classes hold garage sales, and those in the upper classes have estate sales. However, when homeless persons sell their personal possessions, they do so to meet their immediate needs, not because they want to "clean house."

Roles

Role is the dynamic aspect of a status. *We occupy a status, but we play a role* (Linton, 1936). A **role is a set of behavioral expectations associated with a given status**. For example, a carpenter (employee) hired to remodel a kitchen is not expected to sit down uninvited and join the family (employer) for dinner.

Role expectation is a group's or society's definition of the way that a specific role ought to be played. By contrast, **role performance is how a person actually plays the role.** Role performance does not always match role expectation. Some statuses have role expectations that are highly specific, such as that of surgeon or college professor. Other statuses, such as friend or significant other, have less structured expectations. The role expectations tied to the status of student are more specific than those for being a friend. Role expectations are typically based on a range of acceptable behavior rather than on strictly defined standards.

Our roles are relational (or complementary); that is, they are defined in the context of roles performed by others. We can play the role of student because someone else fulfills the role of professor. Conversely, to perform the role of professor, the teacher must have one or more students.

Role ambiguity occurs when the expectations associated with a role are unclear. For example, it is not always clear when the provider-dependent aspect of the parent-child relationship ends. Should it end at age eighteen or twenty-one? When a person is no longer in school? Different people will answer these questions differently depending on their experiences and socialization, as well as on parents' financial capability and psychological willingness to continue contributing to the welfare of their adult children.

ROLE CONFLICT AND ROLE STRAIN Most people occupy a number of statuses, each of which has numerous role expectations attached. For example, Charles is a student who attends morning classes at the university, and he is an employee at a fast-food restaurant where he works from 3:00 to 10:00 P.M. He also is Stephanie's boyfriend, and she would like to see him more often. On December 7, Charles has a final exam at 7:00 P.M., when he is supposed to be working. Meanwhile, Stephanie is pressuring him to take her to a movie. To top it off, his mother calls, asking him to fly home because his father is going to have emergency surgery. How can Charles be in all of these places at once? Such experiences of role conflict can be overwhelming.

Role conflict occurs when incompatible role demands are placed on a person by two or more statuses held at the same time. When role conflict occurs, we may feel pulled in different directions. To deal with this problem, we may prioritize our roles and first complete the one that we consider to be most important. Or we may compartmentalize our lives and "insulate" our various roles (Merton, 1968). That is, we may perform the activities linked to one role for part of the day, and then engage in the activities associated with another role in some other time period or elsewhere.

Role conflict may occur as a result of changing statuses and roles in society. Research has found that women who engage in behavior that is gender-typed as "masculine" tend to have higher rates of role conflict than those who engage in traditional "feminine" behavior (Basow, 1992). According to sociologist Tracey Watson (1987), role conflict can sometimes be attributed not to the roles themselves but to the pressures people feel when they do not fit into culturally prescribed roles. In her study of women athletes in college sports programs, Watson found role conflict in the traditionally incongruent identities of being a woman and being an athlete. Even though the women athletes in her study wore makeup and presented a conventional image when they were not on the basketball court, their peers in school still saw them as "female jocks," thus leading to role conflict.

Whereas role conflict occurs between two or more statuses (such as being homeless and being a temporary employee of a social services agency), role strain takes place within one status. **Role strain occurs when incompatible demands are**



How do working parents deal with competing demands on their time and energy? What term do sociologists use to describe the situation reflected in this photograph?

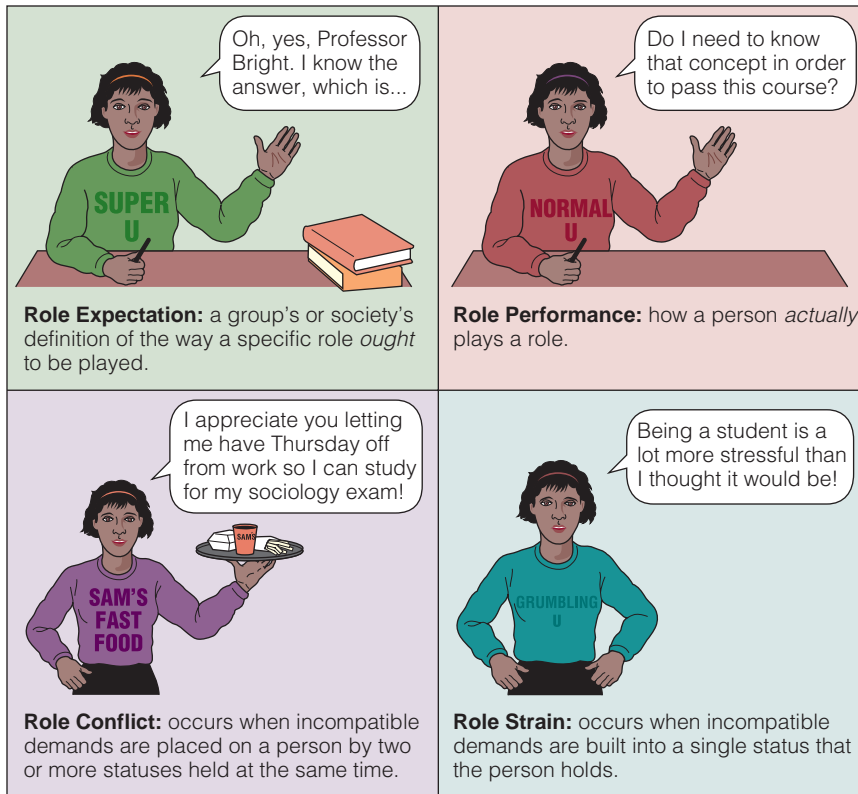
built into a single status that a person occupies (Goode, 1960). For example, many women experience role strain in the labor force because they hold jobs that are "less satisfying and more stressful than men's jobs since they involve less money, less prestige, fewer job openings, more career roadblocks, and so forth" (Basow, 1992: 192). Similarly, married women may experience more role strain than married men, because of work overload, marital inequality with their spouse, exclusive parenting responsibilities, unclear expectations, and lack of emotional support.

Recent social changes may have increased role strain in men. In the family, men's traditional position of dominance has eroded as more women have entered the paid labor force and demanded more assistance in child-rearing and homemaking responsibilities. Despite the role strain that some men and women may experience in marriage, re-

FIGURE 4.2

Role Expectation, Performance, Conflict, and Strain

As a student, have you encountered situations such as these?



cent studies indicate that married people tend to have lower rates of alcohol and drug abuse and depression than single individuals (Marano, 1998).

Sexual orientation and occupation are frequently associated with role strain. Lesbians and gay men often experience role strain because of the pressures associated with having an identity heavily stigmatized by the dominant cultural group (Basow, 1992). Dentists, psychiatrists, and police officers have been found to experience high levels of occupation-related role strain, which may result in suicide. (The concepts of role orientation, role performance, role conflict, and role strain are illustrated in Figure 4.2.)

ROLE EXIT *Role exit* occurs when people disengage from social roles that have been central to their self-identity (Ebaugh, 1988). Sociologist Helen

Rose Fuchs Ebaugh studied this process by interviewing ex-convicts, ex-nuns, retirees, divorced men and women, and others who had exited voluntarily from significant social roles. According to Ebaugh, role exit occurs in four stages. The first stage is doubt, in which people experience frustration or burnout when they reflect on their existing roles. The second stage involves a search for alternatives; here, people may take a leave of absence from their work or temporarily separate from their marriage partner. The third stage is the turning point at which people realize that they must take some final action, such as quitting their job or getting a divorce. The fourth and final stage involves the creation of a new identity.

Exiting the “homeless” role often is very difficult. The longer a person remains on the streets, the more difficult it becomes to exit this role. Personal

For many years, capitalism has been dominated by powerful “old-boy” social networks. How does social solidarity help some people maintain a privileged position in society?



resources diminish over time. Personal possessions (such as tools, clothes, and identification papers) are often stolen, lost, sold, or pawned. Work experience and skills become outdated, and physical disabilities that prevent individuals from working are likely to develop on the streets. However, a number of homeless people are able to exit this role. For example, Christopher, a former crack addict who had lived in New York subway stations, was able to become a domiciled person after completing a drug rehabilitation program and receiving assistance from a community service agency:

I felt like I had reached the end of my life. I felt awful talking to people with dirty tennis shoes and ripped pants, smelling bad. I couldn't look anybody in the eye. Once you're taking drugs, nobody respects you, especially you. (qtd. in R. Kennedy, 1993: A15)

Of course, many of the homeless do not beat the odds and exit this role. Instead, they shift their focus from role exiting to survival on the streets.

Groups

Groups are another important component of social structure. To sociologists, a **social group** consists of two or more people who interact fre-

quently and share a common identity and a feeling of interdependence. Throughout our lives, most of us participate in groups: our families and childhood friends, our college classes, our work and community organizations, and even society.

Primary and secondary groups are the two basic types of social groups. A **primary group** is a small, less specialized group in which members engage in face-to-face, emotion-based interactions over an extended period of time. Typically, primary groups include our family, close friends, and school- or work-related peer groups. By contrast, a **secondary group** is a larger, more specialized group in which members engage in more impersonal, goal-oriented relationships for a limited period of time. Schools, churches, the military, and corporations are examples of secondary groups. In secondary groups, people have few, if any, emotional ties to one another. Instead, they come together for some specific, practical purpose, such as getting a degree or a paycheck. Secondary groups are more specialized than primary ones; individuals relate to one another in terms of specific roles (such as professor and student) and more limited activities (such as course-related endeavors).

Social solidarity, or cohesion, relates to a group's ability to maintain itself in the face of obstacles.

Social solidarity exists when social bonds, attractions, or other forces hold members of a group in interaction over a period of time (Jary and Jary, 1991). For example, if a local church is destroyed by fire and congregation members still worship together in a makeshift setting, then they have a high degree of social solidarity.

Many of us build social networks from our personal friends in primary groups and our acquaintances in secondary groups. A *social network* is a series of social relationships that links an individual to others. Social networks work differently for men and women, for different races/ethnicities, and for members of different social classes. Traditionally, people of color and white women have been excluded from powerful “old-boy” social networks (Kanter, 1993; McPherson and Smith-Lovin, 1982, 1986). At the middle-class and upper-class levels, individuals tap social networks to find employment, make business deals, and win political elections. However, social networks typically do not work effectively for poor and homeless individuals. Snow and Anderson (1993) found that homeless men have fragile social networks that are plagued with instability. Often, homeless men do not even know one another’s “real” names.

Sociological research on the homeless has largely emphasized the social isolation experienced by people on the streets. Sociologist Peter H. Rossi (1989) found that a high degree of social isolation exists because the homeless are separated from their extended family and former friends. Rossi noted that among the homeless who did have families, most either did not wish to return or believed that they would not be welcome. Most of the avenues for exiting the homeless role and acquiring housing are intertwined with the large-scale, secondary groups that sociologists refer to as formal organizations.

A formal organization is a highly structured group formed for the purpose of completing certain tasks or achieving specific goals. Many of us spend most of our time in formal organizations, such as colleges, corporations, or the government. In Chapter 5 (“Groups and Organizations”), we analyze the characteristics of bureaucratic organizations; however, at this point, we should note that these organizations are a very important component of social structure in all industrialized societies. We expect such organizations to educate us,



Professional women have increasingly turned to sporting activities such as golf or tennis to create social networks that enhance their business opportunities.

solve our social problems (such as crime and homelessness), and provide work opportunities.

Many formal organizations today have been referred to as “people-processing” organizations. For example, the Salvation Army and other caregiver groups provide services for the homeless and others in need. However, these organizations must work with limited monetary resources and at the same time maintain some control of their clientele. This control is necessary in order to provide their services in an orderly and timely fashion, according to a major at the Salvation Army:

I’ll sleep and feed almost anybody, but such help requires that they be deserving. Some people would say I’m cold-hearted, but I rule with an iron hand. I have to because these guys need to respect authority. . . . The experience of working with these guys has

taught us the necessity of rules in order to avoid problems. (qtd. in Snow and Anderson, 1993: 81)

Because of rules and policies, the “Sally” (as the Salvation Army is sometimes called) tends to close its doors to those who are currently inebriated, are chronic drunks, or are viewed as “troublemakers.” Likewise, a number of women’s shelters have restrictions and regulations that some of the women feel deprive them of their personhood. One shelter used to require a compulsory gynecological examination of its residents (Golden, 1992). Another required that the women be out of the building by 7:00 A.M. and not return before 7:00 P.M. Nevertheless, organizations such as the Salvation Army and women’s shelters do help people within the limited means available.

Social Institutions

At the macrolevel of all societies, certain basic activities routinely occur—children are born and socialized, goods and services are produced and distributed, order is preserved, and a sense of purpose is maintained (Aberle et al., 1950; Mack and Bradford, 1979). Social institutions are the means by which these basic needs are met. A **social institution** is a set of organized beliefs and rules that establishes how a society will attempt to meet its basic social needs. In the past, these needs have centered around five basic social institutions: the family, religion, education, the economy, and the government or politics. Today, mass media, sports, science and medicine, and the military are also considered to be social institutions.

What is the difference between a group and a social institution? A group is composed of specific, identifiable people; an institution is a standardized way of doing something. The concept of “family” helps to distinguish between the two. When we talk about your family or my family, we are referring to a family. When we refer to the family as a social institution, we are talking about ideologies and standardized patterns of behavior that organize family life. For example, the family as a social institution contains certain statuses organized into well-defined relationships, such as husband–wife, parent–child, and brother–sister. Specific families do not always conform to these ideologies and behavior patterns.

Functional theorists emphasize that social institutions exist because they perform five essential tasks:

1. *Replacing members.* Societies and groups must have socially approved ways of replacing members who move away or die. The family provides the structure for legitimated sexual activity—and thus procreation—between adults.
2. *Teaching new members.* People who are born into a society or move into it must learn the group’s values and customs. The family is essential in teaching new members, but other social institutions educate new members as well.
3. *Producing, distributing, and consuming goods and services.* All societies must provide and distribute goods and services for their members. The economy is the primary social institution fulfilling this need; the government is often involved in the regulation of economic activity.
4. *Preserving order.* Every group or society must preserve order within its boundaries and protect itself from attack by outsiders. The government legitimates the creation of law enforcement agencies to preserve internal order and some form of military for external defense.
5. *Providing and maintaining a sense of purpose.* In order to motivate people to cooperate with one another, a sense of purpose is needed.

Although this list of functional prerequisites is shared by all societies, the institutions in each society perform these tasks in somewhat different ways depending on their specific cultural values and norms.

Conflict theorists agree with functionalists that social institutions are originally organized to meet basic social needs. However, they do not believe that social institutions work for the common good of everyone in society. The homeless, for example, lack the power and resources to promote their own interests when they are opposed by dominant social groups. From the conflict perspective, social institutions such as the government maintain the privileges of the wealthy and powerful while contributing to the powerlessness of others (see Domhoff, 1983, 1990). For example, U.S. government policies in urban areas have benefited some people but exacerbated the problems of others. Urban renewal and transportation projects caused the destruction of low-cost housing and put large numbers of people “on the street” (Katz, 1989).

Similarly, the shift in governmental policies toward the mentally ill and welfare recipients resulted in more people struggling—and often failing—to find affordable housing. Meanwhile, many wealthy and privileged bankers, investors, developers, and builders benefited at the expense of the low-income casualties of those policies.

Functionalist and conflict perspectives provide a macrosociological overview because they concentrate on large-scale events and broad social features. For example, sociologists using the macrosociological approach to study the homeless might analyze how social institutions have operated to produce current conditions. By contrast, the interactionist perspective takes a microsociological approach, asking how social institutions affect our daily lives. We will discuss the microlevel perspective in detail later in this chapter.

SOCIETIES: CHANGES IN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Changes in social structure have a dramatic impact on individuals, groups, and societies. Social arrangements in contemporary societies have grown more complex with the introduction of new technology, changes in values and norms, and the rapidly shrinking “global village.” How do societies maintain some degree of social solidarity in the face of such changes? Sociologists Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies developed typologies to explain the processes of stability and change in the social structure of societies. A *typology* is a classification scheme containing two or more mutually exclusive categories that are used to compare different kinds of behavior or types of societies.

Mechanical and Organic Solidarity

Early sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858/1930) was concerned with the question “How do societies manage to hold together?” Durkheim asserted that preindustrial societies were held together by strong traditions and by the members’ shared moral beliefs and values. As societies industrialized and developed more specialized economic activities, social solidarity came to be rooted in the members’ shared dependence on one another. From Durkheim’s perspective, social solidarity derives from a society’s



Who benefits from urban redevelopment projects? How might functionalists and conflict theorists differ in their interpretations of projects such as the one shown in this photo?

social structure, which, in turn, is based on the society’s division of labor. Division of labor refers to how the various tasks of a society are divided up and performed. However, people in diverse societies (or in the same society at different points in time) divide their tasks somewhat differently, based on their own history, physical environment, and level of technological development.

To explain social change, Durkheim developed a typology that categorized societies as having either mechanical solidarity or organic solidarity. **Mechanical solidarity refers to the social cohesion in preindustrial societies, in which there is minimal division of labor and people feel united by shared values and common social bonds.** Durkheim used the term *mechanical solidarity* because he believed that people in such preindustrial societies feel a more or less automatic sense of belonging. Social interaction is characterized by face-to-face, intimate, primary-group relationships. Everyone is engaged in similar work, and little specialization is found in the division of labor.

Organic solidarity refers to the social cohesion found in industrial societies, in which people perform very specialized tasks and feel united by their mutual dependence. Durkheim chose the term *organic solidarity* because he believed that

Contrary to a popular myth that most homeless people are single drifters, an increasing number of families now are homeless.



individuals in industrial societies come to rely on one another in much the same way that the organs of the human body function interdependently. Social interaction is less personal, more status oriented, and more focused on specific goals and objectives. People no longer rely on morality or shared values for social solidarity; instead, they are bound together by practical considerations.

Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft

Sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936) used the terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* to characterize the degree of social solidarity and social control found in societies (1963/1887). Tönnies was especially concerned about what happens to social solidarity in a society when a “loss of community” occurs.

The ***Gemeinschaft* (guh-MINE-shoft) is a traditional society in which social relationships are based on personal bonds of friendship and kinship and on intergenerational stability.** These relationships are based on ascribed rather than achieved status. In such societies, people have a commitment to the entire group and feel a sense of togetherness. Tönnies used the German term *Gemeinschaft* because it means “commune” or “community”; social solidarity and social control are maintained by the community. Members have a strong sense of belonging, but they also have very limited privacy.

By contrast, the ***Gesellschaft* (guh-ZELL-shoft) is a large, urban society in which social bonds are based on impersonal and specialized relationships, with little long-term commitment to the group or consensus on values.** In such societies, most people are “strangers” who perceive that they have very little in common with most other people. Consequently, self-interest dominates, and little consensus exists regarding values. Tönnies selected the German term *Gesellschaft* because it means “association”; relationships are based on achieved statuses, and interactions among people are both rational and calculated.

Social Structure and Homelessness

In *Gesellschaft* societies such as the United States, a prevailing core value is that people should be able to take care of themselves. Thus, many people view the homeless as “throwaways”—as beyond help or as having already had enough done for them by society. Some argue that the homeless made their own bad decisions, which led them into alcoholism or drug addiction, and should be held responsible for the consequences of their actions. In this sense, homeless people serve as a visible example to others to “follow the rules” lest they experience a similar fate (see White, 1992).

Alternative explanations for homelessness in *Gesellschaft* societies have been suggested. Elliot Liebow (1993) notes that homelessness is rooted in



BOX 4.2 SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL POLICY

HOMELESS RIGHTS VERSUS PUBLIC SPACE

Should homeless persons be allowed to sleep in parks and other public areas? This issue has been the source of controversy in a number of cities, including San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Baltimore, and Santa Monica. As cities have sought to improve their downtown areas and public spaces, they have taken measures to enforce city ordinances controlling loitering (standing around or sleeping in public spaces) and disorderly conduct.

Advocates for the homeless and civil liberties groups have filed lawsuits in several cities claiming that the rights of the homeless are being violated by the enforcement of these laws. The lawsuits assert that the homeless have a right to sleep in parks because no affordable housing is available for them. Advocates also argue that panhandling is a legitimate means of livelihood for some of the homeless and is protected speech under the First Amendment. In addition, they accuse public and law enforcement officials of seeking to punish the homeless on the basis of their “status,” a cruel and unusual punishment prohibited by the Eighth Amendment.

The “homeless problem” is not a new one for city governments. Of the limited public funding that is designated for the homeless, most has been spent on shel-

ters that are frequently overcrowded and otherwise inadequate. Officials in some cities have given homeless people a one-way ticket to another city. Still others have routinely run them out of public spaces. The issue has become more pressing for homeless advocates because cities such as Santa Monica and San Francisco, which previously tolerated the homeless, have now grown weary of the individuals who beg on the streets and live in public spaces.

What responsibility does society have to the homeless? Are laws restricting the hours that public areas or parks are open to the public unfair to homeless persons? Should city workers remove cardboard boxes, blankets, and other “makeshift” homes created by the homeless in parks? Some critics have argued that if the homeless and their advocates win these lawsuits, what they have won (at best) is the right for the homeless to live on the street, where few options for help are available to them. Others believe that if society does not provide affordable housing and job opportunities, the least it can do is stop harassing homeless people who are getting by as best they can. What do you think? What rights are involved? Whose rights should prevail?

Sources: Based on Kozol, 1988; Teir, 1994; and Kaufman, 1996.

poverty; homeless people overwhelmingly are poor people who come from poor families. Homelessness is a “social class phenomenon, the direct result of a steady, across-the-board lowering of the standard of living of the working class and lower class” (Liebow, 1993: 224). As the standard of living falls, those at the bottom rungs of society are plunged into homelessness. The problem is exacerbated by a lack of jobs. Of those who find work, a growing number work full-time, year-round, but remain poor because of substandard wages. Half of the households living

below the poverty line pay more than 70 percent of their income for rent—if they are able to find accommodations that they can afford at all (Roob and McCambridge, 1992). Clearly, there is no simple answer to the question about what should be done to help homeless people. Nor, as discussed in Box 4.2, is there any consensus on what rights the homeless have in public spaces, such as parks and sidewalks. The answers that we derive as a society and as individuals are often based on our social construction of this reality of life.

SOCIAL INTERACTION: THE MICROLEVEL PERSPECTIVE

So far in this chapter, we have focused on society and social structure from a macrolevel perspective. We have seen how the structure of society affects the statuses we occupy, the roles we play, and the groups and organizations to which we belong. We will now look at society from the microlevel perspective, which focuses on social interactions among individuals, especially in face-to-face encounters.

Social Interaction and Meaning

When you are with other people, do you often wonder what they think of you? If so, you are not alone! Because most of us are concerned about the meanings that others ascribe to our behavior, we try to interpret their words and actions so that we can plan how we will react toward them (Blumer, 1969). We know that others have expectations of us. We also have certain expectations about them. For example, if we enter an elevator that has only one other person in it, we do not expect that individual to confront us and stare into our eyes. As a matter of fact, we would be quite upset if the person did so.

Social interaction within a given society has certain shared meanings across situations. For instance, our reaction would be the same regardless of *which* elevator we rode in *which* building. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1963b) described these shared meanings in his observation about two pedestrians approaching each other on a public sidewalk. He noted that each will tend to look at the other just long enough to acknowledge the other's presence. By the time they are about eight feet away from each other, both individuals will tend to look downward. Goffman referred to this behavior as *civil inattention*—the ways in which an individual shows an awareness that others are present without making them the object of particular attention. The fact that people engage in civil inattention demonstrates that interaction does have a pattern, or *interaction order*, that regulates the form and processes (but not the content) of social interaction.

Does everyone interpret social interaction rituals in the same way? No. Race/ethnicity, gender, and social class play a part in the meanings we give to our interactions with others, including chance encounters on elevators or the street. Our perceptions about the meaning of a situation vary widely based on the statuses we occupy and our unique personal experiences. For example, sociologist Carol Brooks Gardner (1989) found that women frequently do not perceive street encounters to be “routine” rituals. When they walk down the street, they fear for their personal safety and try to avoid comments and propositions that are sexual in nature. African Americans may also feel uncomfortable in street encounters. A middle-class African American college student described his experiences walking home at night from a campus job:

So, even if you wanted to, it's difficult just to live a life where you don't come into conflict with others. . . . Every day that you live as a black person you're reminded how you're perceived in society. You walk the streets at night; white people cross the streets. I've seen white couples and individuals dart in front of cars to not be on the same side of the street. Just the other day, I was walking down the street, and this white female with a child, I saw her pass a young white male about 20 yards ahead. When she saw me, she quickly dragged the child and herself across the busy street. . . . [When I pass,] white men tighten their grip on their women. I've seen people turn around and seem like they're going to take blows from me. . . . So, every day you realize [you're black]. Even though you're not doing anything wrong; you're just existing. You're just a person. But you're a black person perceived in an unblack world. (qtd. in Feagin, 1991: 111–112)

As this passage indicates, social encounters have different meanings for men and women, whites and people of color, and individuals from different social classes. Members of the dominant classes regard the poor, unemployed, and working class as less worthy of attention, frequently subjecting them to subtle yet systematic “attention deprivation” (Derber, 1983). The same can certainly be said about how members of the dominant classes “interact” with the homeless.



According to interactionists, people may have sharply contrasting perceptions of the same reality. How is this concept evident in these people's views about the death penalty in the United States?

The Social Construction of Reality

If we interpret other people's actions so subjectively, can we have a shared social reality? Some interaction theorists believe that there is very little shared reality beyond that which is socially created. Interactionists refer to this as the **social construction of reality**—the process by which our perception of reality is shaped largely by the subjective meaning that we give to an experience (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). This meaning strongly influences what we “see” and how we respond to situations.

As discussed previously, our perceptions and behavior are influenced by how we initially define situations: We act on reality as we see it. Sociologists describe this process as the *definition of the situation*, meaning that we analyze a social context in which we find ourselves, determine what is in our best interest, and adjust our attitudes and actions accordingly. This can result in a **self-fulfilling prophecy**—a false belief or prediction that produces behavior that makes the originally false belief come true (Thomas and Thomas, 1928: 572). An example would be a person who has been told repeatedly that she or he is not a good student; eventually, this person might come to believe it to be true, stop studying, and receive failing grades.

People may define a given situation in very different ways, a tendency demonstrated by the sociologist Jacqueline Wiseman (1970) in her study of “Pacific City’s” skid row. She wanted to know how

people who live or work on skid row (a run-down area found in all cities) felt about it. Wiseman found that homeless persons living on skid row evaluated it very differently from the social workers who dealt with them there. On the one hand, many of the social workers “saw” skid row as a smelly, depressing area filled with men who were “down-and-out,” alcoholic, and often physically and mentally ill. On the other hand, the men who lived on skid row did not see it in such a negative light. They experienced some degree of satisfaction with their “bottle clubs [and a] remarkably indomitable and creative spirit”—at least initially (Wiseman, 1970: 18). As this study shows, we define situations from our own frame of reference, based on the statuses that we occupy and the roles that we play.

Dominant group members with prestigious statuses may have the ability to establish how other people define “reality” (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 109). For example, the media often set the tone for our current opinions about homelessness, either with negative stories about the problems the homeless “cause” or with “human interest” stories, as discussed in Box 4.3.

Ethnomethodology

How do we know how to interact in a given situation? What rules do we follow? Ethnomethodologists are interested in the answers to these questions. **Ethnomethodology is the study of the**



BOX 4.3 SOCIOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY

THE HOMELESS AND THE HOLIDAYS

Why do newspaper and television stories on the homeless proliferate in November, December, and January, as shown in Figure 1? Journalists may find the plight of the homeless more newsworthy during the cold winter months and the holiday season because of the stark contrast between their situation and that of the domiciled. Homeless people constitute “human interest” stories for the holiday season. Members of the press barrage service providers at “soup kitchens” and homeless shelters for interviews and stories about “Jimmy G.” or “Sherry P.,” and volunteers are shown as they serve turkey dinners to the homeless on Thanksgiving.

From one viewpoint, the media serve an important function by keeping the public aware of the plight of homeless people. A recent television public service announcement featured homeless people in New York. The commercial begins with a voice singing “New York, New York,” the first line of a song from a popular Broadway musical that emphasizes the importance of success. Next, the camera shows that the voice singing “Start spreading the news, I’m leaving today” belongs to a homeless man sitting on a bench. Then, line by line, the rest of the song is sung by a series of homeless men and women in tattered clothing. Gradually, the disparity between being home and being homeless for the holidays (and every other day) is made vivid. Then, after one homeless person sings “If I can make it there, I’ll make it anywhere,” the

screen abruptly fades to black. The words to the next line of the song appear, addressing the viewer: “It’s up to you, New York, New York. The Coalition for the Homeless.” Similar media campaigns for the homeless have employed billboards, newspapers, and magazines. One newspaper ad and billboard poster had a drawing of Jesus above the headline “How can you worship a homeless man on Sunday and ignore one on Monday?”

From another viewpoint, the media perpetuate negative images and myths about the homeless. In some articles and news stories, the homeless are depicted as drug addicts, alcoholics, or con artists who choose to be homeless. Photographs of homeless women and men in alcohol- or drug-induced stupors lying on park benches, heat grates, and the street reinforce these stereotypes. After decrying the societal problems caused by the homeless, one journalist suggested quarantining homeless men on military bases. By using the money currently spent on shelters for this purpose, this writer continued, the men would receive required medical treatment and an education in ethics, philosophy, art, and music.

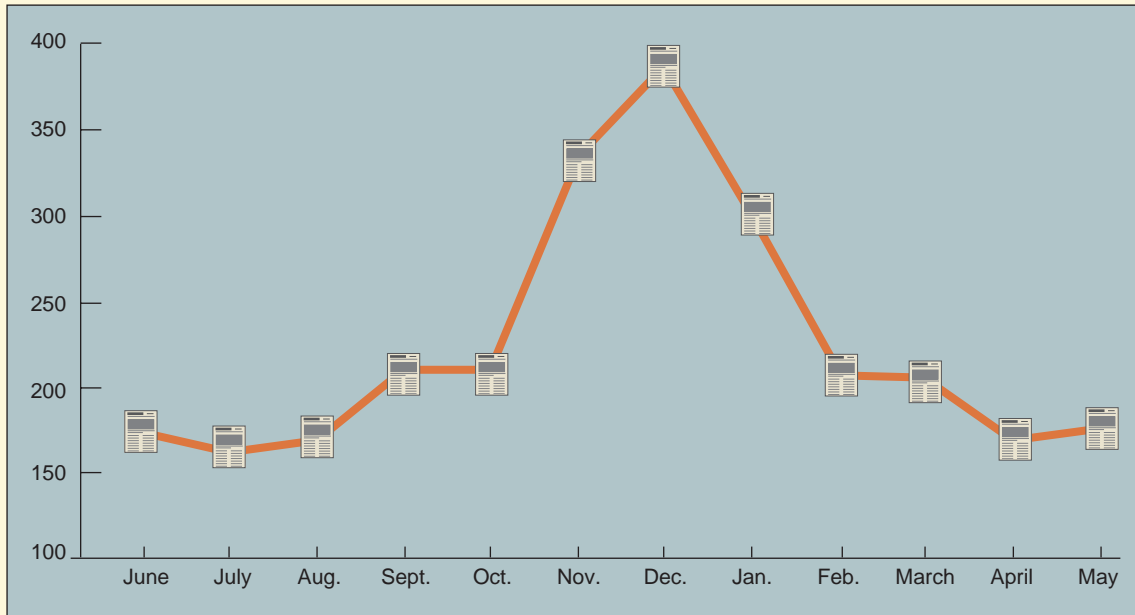
What do you think about the media’s coverage of the homeless? Does extensive coverage at the holiday season perhaps appeal to the “guilty conscience” of domiciled individuals who have a place to live while the homeless do not?

Sources: Based on Leonard and Randell, 1992; Elliott, 1993; Hamill, 1993; and Snow and Anderson, 1993.

commonsense knowledge that people use to understand the situations in which they find themselves (Heritage, 1984: 4). Sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1967) initiated this approach and coined the term: *ethno* for “people” or “folk” and *methodology* for “a system of methods.” Garfinkel was critical of mainstream sociology for not recognizing the ongoing ways in which people create re-

ality and produce their own world. Consequently, ethnomethodologists examine existing patterns of conventional behavior in order to uncover people’s *background expectancies*—that is, their shared interpretation of objects and events, as well as their resulting actions (Zimmerman, 1992). According to ethnomethodologists, interaction is based on assumptions of shared expectancies. For

FIGURE 1 New York Times Stories on the Homeless, by Month, 1975–1993



Sources: Snow and Anderson, 1993; Bunis, Yancik, and Snow, 1996.

example, when you are talking with someone, what expectations do you have that you will take turns? Based on your background expectancies, would you be surprised if the other person talked for an hour and never gave you a chance to speak?

To uncover people's background expectancies, ethnomethodologists frequently break "rules" or act as though they do not understand some basic

rule of social life so that they can observe other people's responses. In a series of *breaching experiments*, Garfinkel assigned different activities to his students to see how breaking the unspoken rules of behavior created confusion. In one experiment, when students participating in the study were asked "How are you?" by persons not in the study, they were instructed to respond with very detailed

accounts of their health and personal problems, as in this example:

Acquaintance: How are you?

Student: How am I in regard to what? My health, my finances, my school work, my peace of mind, my . . .

Acquaintance (red in the face and suddenly out of control): Look! I was just trying to be polite. Frankly, I don't give a damn how you are. (Garfinkel, 1967: 44)

In this encounter, the acquaintance expected the student to use conventional behavior in answering the question. By acting unconventionally, the student violated background expectancies and effectively “sabotaged” the interaction.

The ethnomethodological approach contributes to our knowledge of social interaction by making us aware of subconscious social realities in our daily lives. However, a number of sociologists regard ethnomethodology as a frivolous approach to studying human behavior because it does not examine the impact of macrolevel social institutions—such as the economy and education—on people's expectancies. Women's studies scholars suggest that ethnomethodologists fail to do what they claim to: look at how social realities are created. Rather, they take ascribed statuses (such as race, class, gender, and age) as “givens,” not as *socially created* realities. For example, in the experiments that Garfinkel assigned to his students, he did not account for how gender affected their experiences. When Garfinkel asked students to reduce the distance between themselves and a non-relative to the point that “their noses were almost touching,” he ignored the fact that gender was as important to the encounter as was the proximity of the two persons. Scholars have recently emphasized that our expectations about reality are strongly influenced by our assumptions relating to gender, race, and social class (see Bologh, 1992).

Dramaturgical Analysis

Erving Goffman suggested that day-to-day interactions have much in common with being on stage or in a dramatic production. ***Dramaturgical analysis* is the study of social interaction that compares everyday life to a theatrical presenta-**

tion. Members of our “audience” judge our performance and are aware that we may slip and reveal our true character (Goffman, 1959, 1963a). Consequently, most of us attempt to play our role as well as possible and to control the impressions we give to others. *Impression management*, or ***presentation of self***, refers to people's efforts to present themselves to others in ways that are most favorable to their own interests or image.

For example, suppose that a professor has returned graded exams to your class. Will you discuss the exam and your grade with others in the class? If you are like most people, you probably play your student role differently depending on whom you are talking to and what grade you received on the exam. Your “presentation” may vary depending on the grade earned by the other person (your “audience”). In one study, students who all received high grades (“Ace–Ace encounters”) willingly talked with one another about their grades and sometimes engaged in a little bragging about how they had “aced” the test. However, encounters between students who had received high grades and those who had received low or failing grades (“Ace–Bomber encounters”) were uncomfortable. The Aces felt as if they had to minimize their own grades. Consequently, they tended to attribute their success to “luck” and were quick to offer the Bombers words of encouragement. On the other hand, the Bombers believed that they had to praise the Aces and hide their own feelings of frustration and disappointment. Students who received low or failing grades (“Bomber–Bomber encounters”) were more comfortable when they talked with one another because they could share their negative emotions. They often indulged in self-pity and relied on face-saving excuses (such as an illness or an unfair exam) for their poor performances (Albas and Albas, 1988).

In Goffman's terminology, *face-saving behavior* refers to the strategies that we use to rescue our performance when we experience a potential or current loss of face. When the Bombers made excuses for their low scores, they were engaged in face-saving; the Aces attempted to help them save face by asserting that the test was unfair or that it was only a small part of the final grade. Why would the Aces and Bombers both participate in face-saving behavior? In most social interactions,



According to the sociologist Erving Goffman, our day-to-day interactions have much in common with a dramatic production. What everyday emotions are the actors in *Rent*, the Broadway play, expressing here?

all role players have an interest in keeping the “play” going so that they can maintain their overall definition of the situation in which they perform their roles.

Goffman noted that people consciously participate in *studied nonobservance*, a face-saving technique in which one role player ignores the flaws in another’s performance to avoid embarrassment for everyone involved. Most of us remember times when we have failed in our role and know that it is likely to happen again; thus, we may be more forgiving of the role failures of others.

Social interaction, like a theater, has a front stage and a back stage. The *front stage* is the area where a player performs a specific role before an audience. The *back stage* is the area where a player is not required to perform a specific role because it is out of view of a given audience. For example, when the Aces and Bombers were talking with one another at school, they were on the “front stage.” When they were in the privacy of their own residences, they were in “back stage” settings—they no longer had to perform the Ace and Bomber roles and could be themselves.

The need for impression management is most intense when role players have widely divergent or devalued statuses. As we have seen with the Aces and Bombers, the participants often play different

roles under different circumstances and keep their various audiences separated from one another. If one audience becomes aware of other roles that a person plays, the impression being given at that time may be ruined.

The dramaturgical approach helps us think about the roles we play and the audiences who judge our presentation of self. Like all approaches, it has its critics. Sociologist Alvin Gouldner (1970) criticized the dramaturgical approach for focusing on appearances and not the underlying substance. Others have argued that Goffman’s work reduces the self to “a peg on which the clothes of the role are hung” (see Burns, 1992) or have suggested that this approach does not place enough emphasis on the ways in which our everyday interactions with other people are influenced by occurrences within the larger society. For example, if some members of Congress belittle the homeless as being lazy and unwilling to work, it may become easier for people walking down a street to do likewise. Goffman’s defenders counter that he captured the essence of society because social interaction “turns out to be not only where most of the world’s work gets done, but where the solid buildings of the social world are in fact constructed” (Burns, 1992: 380). Goffman’s work was influential in the development of the sociology of emotions, a relatively new area of theory and research.



Biker gangs like the Hell's Angels are very good at impression management. How do you think their front stage and back stage roles differ?

The Sociology of Emotions

Why do we laugh, cry, or become angry? Are these emotional expressions biological or social in nature? To some extent, emotions are a biologically given sense (like hearing, smell, and touch), but they also are social in origin. We are socialized to feel certain emotions, and we learn how and when to express (or not express) those emotions (Hochschild, 1983: 219).

How do we know which emotions are appropriate for a given role? Sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983) suggests that we acquire a set of *feeling rules* that shapes the appropriate emotions for a given role or specific situation. These rules include how, where, when, and with whom an emotion should

be expressed. For example, for the role of a mourner at a funeral, feeling rules tell us which emotions are required (sadness and grief, for example), which are acceptable (a sense of relief that the deceased no longer has to suffer), and which are unacceptable (enjoyment of the occasion expressed by laughing out loud) (see Hochschild, 1983: 63–68).

Feeling rules also apply to our occupational roles. For example, the truck driver who handles explosive cargos must be able to suppress fear. Although all jobs place some burden on our feelings, *emotional labor* occurs only in jobs that require personal contact with the public or the production of a state of mind (such as hope, desire, or fear) in others (Hochschild, 1983). With emotional labor, employees must display certain carefully selected emotions. For example, flight attendants are required to act friendly toward passengers, to be helpful and open to requests, and to maintain an “omnipresent smile” in order to enhance the customer’s status. By contrast, bill collectors are encouraged to show anger and make threats to customers, thereby supposedly deflating customers’ status and wearing down their presumed resistance to paying past-due bills. In both jobs, the employees are expected to show feelings that are often not their true feelings (Hochschild, 1983).

Emotional labor may produce feelings of estrangement from one’s “true” self. C. Wright Mills (1956) suggested that when we “sell our personality” in the course of selling goods or services, we engage in a seriously self-alienating process. In other words, the “commercialization” of our feelings may dehumanize our work role performance and create alienation and contempt that spill over into other aspects of our life (Hochschild, 1983; Smith and Kleinman, 1989).

Those who are unemployed and homeless are also required to engage in emotional labor. Governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations that function as caregivers to the homeless sometimes require emotional labor (such as feelings of gratitude or penitence) from their recipients. Homeless people have been denied social services even when they were eligible and have been asked to leave shelters when they did not show the appropriate deference and gratitude toward staff members (Liebow, 1993).



Is it acceptable for men to cry? In our society, males generally learn to suppress strong displays of emotion in everyday life. But in certain settings, such as high-stakes athletic competition, the same behavior may be seen as perfectly natural.

Do all people experience and express emotions the same way? It is widely believed that women express emotions more readily than men; as a result, very little research has been conducted to determine its accuracy. In fact, women and men may differ more in the way they *express* their emotions than in their actual feelings (Fabes and Martin, 1991). Differences in emotional expression may also be attributed to socialization; the extent to which men and women have been taught that a given emotion is appropriate (or inappropriate) for their gender certainly plays an important part in their perceptions (Lombardo et al., 1983).

Social class is also a determinant in managed expression and emotion management. Emotional labor is emphasized in middle- and upper-class families. Since middle- and upper-class parents often work with people, they are more likely to teach their children the importance of emotional labor in their own careers than are working-class parents, who tend to work with things, not people (Hochschild, 1983). Race is also an important factor in emotional labor. People of color spend much

of their life engaged in emotional labor, because racist attitudes and discrimination make it continually necessary to manage one's feelings.

Clearly, Hochschild's contribution to the sociology of emotions helps us understand the social context of our feelings and the relationship between the roles we play and the emotions we experience. However, her thesis has been criticized for overemphasizing the cost of emotional labor and the emotional controls that exist outside the individual (Wouters, 1989). The context in which emotions are studied and the specific emotions examined are important factors in determining the costs and benefits of emotional labor.

Nonverbal Communication

In a typical stage drama, the players not only speak their lines but also convey information by nonverbal communication. In Chapter 3, we discussed the importance of language; now we will look at the messages we communicate without speaking. **Nonverbal communication is the transfer of information between persons without the use of speech.** It includes not only visual cues (gestures, appearances) but also vocal features (inflection, volume, pitch) and environmental factors (use of space, position) that affect meanings (Wood, 1994). Facial expressions, head movements, body positions, and other gestures carry as much of the total *meaning* of our communication with others as our spoken words do (Wood, 1994: 151).

Nonverbal communication may be intentional or unintentional. Actors, politicians, and salespersons may make deliberate use of nonverbal communication to convey an idea or "make a sale." We also may send nonverbal messages through gestures or facial expressions or even our appearance without intending to let other people know what we are thinking.

FUNCTIONS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION Nonverbal communication often supplements verbal communication (Wood, 1994). Head and facial movements may provide us with information about other people's emotional states, and others receive similar information from us (Samovar and Porter, 1991a). We obtain first impressions of others from various kinds of nonverbal communication, such as the clothing they wear and their body positions.



Nonverbal communication may be thought of as an international language. What message do you receive from the facial expression, body position, and gestures of each of these people? Is it possible to misinterpret their messages?

Our social interaction is regulated by nonverbal communication. Through our body posture and eye contact, we signal that we do or do not wish to speak to someone. For example, we may look down at the sidewalk or off into the distance when we pass homeless persons who look as if they are going to ask for money.

Nonverbal communication establishes the relationship between people in terms of their responsiveness to and power over one another (Wood, 1994). For example, we show that we are responsive toward or like another person by maintaining eye contact and attentive body posture and perhaps by touching and standing close. By contrast, we sig-

nal to others that we do not wish to be near them or that we dislike them by refusing to look them in the eye or to stand near them. We can even express power or control over others through nonverbal communication. Goffman (1956) suggested that *demeanor* (how we behave or conduct ourselves) is relative to social power. People in positions of dominance are allowed a wider range of permissible actions than are their subordinates, who are expected to show deference. *Deference* is the symbolic means by which subordinates give a required permissive response to those in power; it confirms the existence of inequality and reaffirms each person's relationship to the other (Rollins, 1985).

FACIAL EXPRESSION, EYE CONTACT, AND TOUCHING Deference behavior is important in regard to facial expression, eye contact, and touching. This type of nonverbal communication is symbolic of our relationships with others. Who smiles? Who stares? Who makes and sustains eye contact? Who touches whom? All of these questions relate to demeanor and deference; the key issue is the status of the person who is *doing* the smiling, staring, or touching relative to the status of the recipient (Goffman, 1967).

Facial expressions, especially smiles, also reflect gender-based patterns of dominance and subordination in society. Typically, white women have been socialized to smile and frequently do so even when they are not actually happy (Halberstadt and Saitta, 1987). Jobs held predominantly by women (including flight attendant, secretary, elementary schoolteacher, and nurse) are more closely associated with being pleasant and smiling than are “men’s jobs.” In addition to smiling more frequently, many women tend to tilt their heads in deferential positions when they are talking or listening to others. By contrast, men tend to display less emotion through smiles or other facial expressions and instead seek to show that they are “reserved and in control” (Wood, 1994: 164).

Women are more likely to sustain eye contact during conversations (but not otherwise) as a means of showing their interest in and involvement with others. By contrast, men are less likely to maintain prolonged eye contact during conversations but are more likely to stare at other people (especially men) in order to challenge them and assert their own status (Pearson, 1985).

Eye contact can be a sign of domination or deference. For example, in a participant observation study of domestic (household) workers and their employers, the sociologist Judith Rollins (1985) found that the domestics were supposed to show deference by averting their eyes when they talked to their employers. Deference also required that they present an “exaggeratedly subservient demeanor” by standing less erect and walking tentatively.

Touching is another form of nonverbal behavior that has many different shades of meaning. Gender and power differences are evident in tactile communication from birth. Studies have shown that touching has variable meanings to parents:

Boys are touched more roughly and playfully, whereas girls are handled more gently and protectively (Condry, Condry, and Pogatshnik, 1983). This pattern continues into adulthood, with women touched more frequently than men. Sociologist Nancy Henley (1977) attributed this pattern to power differentials between men and women and to the nature of women’s roles as mothers, nurses, teachers, and secretaries. Clearly, touching has a different meaning to women than to men (Stier and Hall, 1984). Women may hug and touch others to indicate affection and emotional support, whereas men are more likely to touch others to give directions, assert power, and express sexual interest (Wood, 1994: 162). The “meaning” that we give to touching is related to its “duration, intensity, frequency, and the body parts touching and being touched” (Wood, 1994: 162).

PERSONAL SPACE Physical space is an important component of nonverbal communication. Anthropologist Edward Hall (1966) analyzed the physical distance between people speaking to one another and found that the amount of personal space that people prefer varies from one culture to another. **Personal space is the immediate area surrounding a person that the person claims as private.** Our personal space is contained within an invisible boundary surrounding our body, much like a snail’s shell. When others invade our space, we may retreat, stand our ground, or even lash out, depending on our cultural background (Samovar and Porter, 1991a).

Age, gender, kind of relationship, and social class are important factors in the allocation of personal space. Power differentials between people (including adults and children, men and women, and dominant group members and people of color) are reflected in personal space and privacy issues. With regard to age, adults generally do not hesitate to enter the personal space of a child (Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley, 1983). Similarly, young children who invade the personal space of an adult tend to elicit a more favorable response than do older uninvited visitors (Dean, Willis, and la Rocco, 1976). The need for personal space appears to increase with age (Baxter, 1970; Aiello and Jones, 1971), although it may begin to decrease at about age forty (Heshka and Nelson, 1972).

For some people, the idea of privacy or personal space is an unheard-of luxury afforded only to those in the middle and upper classes. As we have seen in this chapter, homeless bag ladies may have as their only personal space the bags they carry or the shopping carts they push down the streets. Some of the homeless may try to “stake a claim” on a heat grate or the same bed in a shelter for more than one night, but such claims have dubious authenticity in a society in which the homeless are assumed to own nothing and to have no right to lay claim to anything in the public domain.

In sum, all forms of nonverbal communication are influenced by gender, race, social class, and the personal contexts in which they occur. Although it is difficult to generalize about people’s nonverbal behavior, we still need to think about our own nonverbal communication patterns. Recognizing that differences in social interaction exist is important. We should be wary of making value judgments—the differences are simply *differences*. Learning to understand and respect alternative styles of social interaction enhances our personal effectiveness by increasing the range of options we have for communicating with different people in diverse contexts and for varied reasons (Wood, 1994).

CHANGING SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND INTERACTION IN THE FUTURE

The social structure in the United States has been changing rapidly in recent decades. Currently, there are more possible statuses for persons to occupy and roles to play than at any other time in history. Although achieved statuses are considered very important, ascribed statuses still have a significant effect on the options and opportunities that people have.

Ironically, at a time when we have more technological capability, more leisure activities and types of entertainment, and more quantities of material goods available for consumption than ever before, many people experience high levels of stress, fear for their lives because of crime, and face problems such as homelessness. In a society that can send astronauts into space to perform complex

scientific experiments, is it impossible to solve some of the problems that plague us here on earth? Homelessness is not just a problem in the United States, however.

Individuals and groups often show initiative in trying to solve some of our pressing problems (see Box 4.4). For example, Ellen Baxter has single-handedly tried to create housing for hundreds of New York City’s homeless by reinventing well-maintained, single-room-occupancy residential hotels to provide cheap lodging and social services (Anderson, 1993). According to many social analysts, however, individual initiative alone will not solve all our social problems in the future: Large-scale, formal organizations must become more responsive to society’s needs.

What would happen if we began to view social problems as everyone’s problem? What can be done about homelessness in the future? Martha R. Burt, director of the Urban Institute’s national study of urban homeless shelter and soup kitchen users, believes that people must move beyond seeing personal problems such as mental illness, alcoholism, and drug addiction as the primary causes of homelessness. According to Burt, only changes in structural factors can reduce the homeless population:

To undo the effects of changing structural factors we will have to address the factors themselves, not the vulnerabilities of the people caught by changing times. We can take a short-term approach, raising benefit levels and expanding eligibility to cover those most vulnerable to homelessness. Such actions would prevent homelessness rather than ameliorate it, and are therefore preferable to building emergency shelters. They would not, however, change the underlying conditions, and the need for public support would be likely to continue indefinitely. A far better approach is to fulfill our commitments to support people, such as those with severe mental illness, who cannot be expected to support themselves, and also address simultaneously the employer and the employee requirements for increasing productivity, by reshaping the work environment and improving education and training. If we succeed at this much larger agenda, we



BOX 4.4 YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

OVERCOMING COMPASSION FATIGUE

Homelessness is such an overwhelming problem that many of us believe there is nothing we can do to help homeless people. Rabbi Charles A. Kroloff, senior rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in Westfield, New Jersey, disagrees. As an advocate for the homeless and founder of the Interfaith Council for the Homeless, he has written *54 Ways You Can Help the Homeless*, listing ways that everyday people can do something for homeless persons. Some of his most novel suggestions include how we can help children who are homeless. For example, Rabbi Kroloff (1993: 2) believes that people can use their hobbies and personal interests—such as cooking, repairing, gardening, or photography—to help these children:

Jim Hubbard, a Washington, D.C., professional photographer whose specialty is photographing the homeless, developed “Shooting Back,” a program that teaches homeless children photography. Each week, Hubbard teaches eight children how to use a camera and provides them with free film. According to Hubbard, the children rarely shoot images of decay. Instead, they prefer to take pictures of other children, particularly those leaping into swimming pools or playing in the water spray from fire hydrants. Hubbard explains that the children have an urgent need for housing, but they also need an opportunity to develop self-esteem. He has found that mastering the camera and seeing their own images in print have greatly increased their self-confidence and feelings of self-worth.

Like Jim Hubbard, each of us can make a difference for homeless children. We can contribute hands-on knowledge and experience by tutoring children at homeless shelters, or we can donate funds so that volunteers can provide the children with clothing, toiletries, school supplies, and toys. We can also look into groups such as Children First, which was founded by the Interfaith Council for the Homeless of Union County, New Jersey, and help support enrichment projects—such as workshops and field trips to the zoo, museums, and other settings where homeless children and their parents can participate together in the simple pleasures that many other parents and children take for granted. If you would like to know more about helping homeless persons, contact your local Salvation Army, Coalition for the Homeless, Interfaith group, or one of the following agencies:

- The National Alliance to End Homelessness, 1518 K Street, N.W., Suite 206, Washington, DC 20043-4103. (202) 638-1526.
- National Coalition for the Homeless, 1612 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20009. (202) 460-8112.

You can purchase *54 Ways You Can Help the Homeless* by writing to P.O. Box 712, Westfield, NJ 07091. (Profits are donated to organizations that serve homeless people.) On the Internet:

<http://ecosys.drdr.virginia.edu/ways/54.html>

will solve not only the problem of homelessness, but also the problem of declining living standards for a much broader spectrum of American workers. (Burt, 1992: 225–226)

In sum, the future of the United States may well rest on our collective ability to understand and seek to reduce major social problems at both the macrolevel and the microlevel of society.

CHAPTER REVIEW

How does social structure shape our social interactions?

The stable patterns of social relationships within a particular society make up its social structure. Social structure is a macrolevel influence because it shapes and determines the overall patterns in which social interaction occurs. Social structure provides an ordered framework for society and for our interactions with others.

What are the main components of social structure?

Social structure is made up of statuses, roles, groups, and social institutions. A status is a specific position in a group or society and is characterized by certain expectations, rights, and duties. Ascribed statuses, such as gender, class, and race/ethnicity, are acquired at birth or involuntarily later in life. Achieved statuses, such as education and occupation, are assumed voluntarily as a result of personal choice, merit, or direct effort. We occupy a status, but a role is the set of behavioral expectations associated with a given status. A social group consists of two or more people who interact frequently and share a common identity and sense of interdependence. A formal organization is a highly structured group formed to complete certain tasks or achieve specific goals. A social institution is a set of organized beliefs and rules that establishes how a society attempts to meet its basic needs.

What are the functionalist and conflict perspectives on social institutions?

According to functionalist theorists, social institutions perform several prerequisites of all societies: replace members; teach new members; produce, distribute, and consume goods and services; preserve order; and provide and maintain a sense of purpose. Conflict theorists suggest that social institutions do not work for the common good of all individuals. Institutions may enhance and uphold the power of some groups but exclude others, such as the homeless.

How do societies maintain stability in times of social change?

According to Emile Durkheim, although changes in social structure may dramatically affect individuals and groups, societies manage to maintain some degree of stability. People in preindustrial societies are united by mechanical solidarity because they have shared values and common social bonds. Industrial societies are char-

acterized by organic solidarity, which refers to the cohesion that results when people perform specialized tasks and are united by mutual dependence.

How do Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft societies differ in social solidarity?

According to Ferdinand Tönnies, the *Gemeinschaft* is a traditional society in which relationships are based on personal bonds of friendship and kinship and on intergenerational stability. The *Gesellschaft* is an urban society in which social bonds are based on impersonal and specialized relationships, with little group commitment or consensus on values.

Is all social interaction based on shared meanings?

Social interaction within a society, particularly face-to-face encounters, is guided by certain shared meanings of how we should behave. All meanings may not be shared—race/ethnicity, gender, and social class often influence people's perceptions of meaning.

What is the dramaturgical perspective?

According to Erving Goffman's dramaturgical analysis, our daily interactions are similar to dramatic productions. Presentation of self refers to efforts to present our own self to others in ways that are most favorable to our interests or self-image.

Why are feeling rules important?

Feeling rules shape the appropriate emotions for a given role or specific situation. Our emotions are not always private, and specific emotions may be demanded of us on certain occasions.

Key Terms

achieved status 103
ascribed status 102
dramaturgical analysis 118
ethnomethodology 115
formal organization 109
Gemeinschaft 112
Gesellschaft 112
master status 103
mechanical solidarity 111
nonverbal communication 121
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presentation of self 118
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role expectation 105
role performance 105
role strain 106
secondary group 108
self-fulfilling prophecy 115
social construction of reality 115
social group 108
social institution 110
social interaction 99
social structure 99
status 101
status set 102
stigma 101

Questions for Critical Thinking

1. Think of a person you know well who often irritates you or whose behavior grates on your nerves (it could be a parent, friend, relative, or teacher). First, list that person's statuses and roles. Then analyze the person's possible role expectations, role performance, role conflicts, and role strains. Does anything that you find in your analysis help to explain the irritating behavior? How helpful are the concepts of social structure in analyzing individual behavior?
2. Are structural problems responsible for homelessness, or are homeless individuals responsible for their own situation?
3. You are conducting field research on gender differences in nonverbal communication styles. How are you going to account for variations among age, race, and social class?
4. When communicating with other genders, races, and ages, is it better to express and acknowledge different styles or to develop a common, uniform style?

Internet Exercises



1. Using the Lycos search engine (<http://www.altavista.digital.com/>), try a search of the word *homeless*. Visit five of the sites it identifies,

and try to fit the theme of the pages you choose into one of the perspectives used in this book (e.g., conflict, functionalist, interactionist). With which perspective do you feel the most comfortable?

2. Societies find ways to censure those who would act outside their norms. In addition to **alt.sci.sociology**, also start reading **alt.sci.psychology**. How do people in these newsgroups deal with those who act outside the norms of the group? What ways seem to work best? How does someone become familiar with the norms of a newsgroup?
3. This chapter discusses nonverbal communication. Most people who use e-mail or post to newsgroups will use symbols such as ;-) or :) to indicate emotions without having to type out the words. Do you think that these symbols qualify as nonverbal symbols? How easy is it to determine the meaning of these symbols?

Sociology Internet Resources



See the Wadsworth Sociology Resource Center “Virtual Society” (<http://sociology.wadsworth.com>) for additional links, quizzes, and learning tools related to this chapter.



Either from the “Virtual Society” web site or directly from your web browser, you may access InfoTrac College Edition, an online university library that includes over 600 popular and scholarly journals in which you can find articles related to the topics in this chapter.

Sociology CD-ROM



Go to Wadsworth's Sociology CD-ROM for further study on the concepts in this chapter. The CD-ROM also includes quizzes and additional activities to expand your learning experience.