



Social Psychology

Spring 2003

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CHAIR'S REMARKS*

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Robert Merton, Social Psychologist—Reflections and Memories

Robert Merton, 1997 winner of the Section's Cooley-Mead Award, died, at the age of 92, on February 23rd 2003. The New York Times heading on his obituary described him as a "versatile sociologist and father of the focus group". The lead sentence went on to say that he was "one of the most influential sociologists of the 20th century, whose coinage of terms like "self-fulfilling prophecy" and "role models" filtered from his academic pursuits into everyday language". I am uncertain about how Merton would have felt about this view of the essence of what he had accomplished. I am reasonably sure that he would have been pleased with the emphasis on his importance and versatility. I am quite sure that he would have been delighted by the acknowledgement of his ability to find *l' mot juste* that encapsulated the meaning and clarified the implications of a sociologically profound concept that he had developed. On the other hand, I am less certain, but nevertheless suspect, that he would have been chagrined by the downplaying in the obituary of his importance as a formal theoretician, who in facing some of the basic issues in sociology developed a conceptualization through which he was able to reason his way into the insightful concepts he named so well.

Part of the fault for this neglect may lie with Merton himself. By far the most detailed, elaborated and formal presentation of his theoretical thought was presented in his classroom lectures. Almost invariably, whenever, the relatively few remaining of us who attended his lectures on sociological theory discuss them, notes of awe creep into our voices. Part of this is due to our recollections of the magic of his performance. For example—his elucidating, just as the bell rang ending the class, the, to us, totally unanticipated concept that illuminated the theoretical connections among the apparently diverse phenomena he had spent the last fifty minutes discussing. Part of the awe was due to the fear of many us, who in most circumstances had a pretty confident view of our intellectual abilities, that we would be called upon to answer a question whose answer we couldn't begin to guess at, but which would seem obvious once Merton explained it. Most of the awe was due to the elegance of the thought through which Merton was able to develop a coherent abstract sociological theory from which he was able to draw substantively important conclusions.

About a decade ago, I wrote a paper (Schooler 1994) based on my memory of attending his classes and more importantly the course notes my wife Nina Schooler took while attending Merton's 1957 course. That paper presented (and attempted to further develop) Merton's thinking as put forth in his class lectures. Although vetted by Merton, and probably basically

In this edition of the newsletter:

The 2003 Cooley-Mead Award Winner!

Felson on Violence and Gender

Hunt on Teaching

Hallett on Symbolic Power and the Social Organization of Turmoil

Thanks to the 2002-2003 Section Committees



A number of books and articles have recently addressed the commercialization of universities. A book that advances this theme and other related themes is David Bollier's book, *Silent Theft: The Private Plunder of our Common Wealth*. David Bollier is not an academic (the book cover sports laudatory comments from Ralph Nader and Normal Lear) but develops arguments that relate to universities as well as many other institutions.

I need to admit that much of my research is aimed at public goods and commons settings, and so I am probably predisposed to see the world in these images. But, I believe that this book's theme needs to be seriously considered. The first chapter is entitled, "Reclaiming the Narrative of the Commons," and makes the point that we are losing or have lost the ability to see the existence of the public and the commonly owned. Part of this loss is delivered through the prevalence of concepts of individualism, but political and corporate pressures are implicated—Bollier notes that perhaps notions of the commons are too often associated with "tragedy of" (Hardin's notions) rather than "solution of" (an idea more associated, for example with Elinor Ostrom's work for example).

But within academia, it seems to me that we have always had a commons narrative. (Of course, this was more the case for public, rather than private, schools.) We share our manuscripts, we share our class materials, and we share our teaching. Libraries are based on a commons model. In fact, our ideas are only powerful when they are shared. But, it seems clear that even the academic commons is in jeopardy. Or maybe, *especially* the academic commons is in jeopardy. New copyright laws (The 1998 Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998, for example) have many implications for changing the ways in which we use and distribute classroom and library materials.

We see this also in terms of patents. Bollier provides the example of how Jonas Salk, Albert Sabin and John Enders did not develop notions of "ownership" of their polio vaccine research. But, now universities have become active seekers of patents, due, in part, to legislation that enabled the cooperation of industry and universities (for example the Bayh-Dole legislation in 1980). How has this collaboration between industry and university changed the academic commons?

As Derek Bok notes in a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, academics are being pushed to seek outside support for their research and their graduate students because university support from traditional sources has drastically decreased. (Declining allocations from states to public universities makes this pressure especially strong). Businesses find universities attractive because they house academics that value creativity and discovery and have the expertise to dedicate to projects. The lack of alternatives and active recruitment from companies makes industry partnerships lucrative. However, contracts received from industries often place restrictions on sharing material and the rights to review and potentially delay

publication. (See Bollier 2002:140 and discussions of an NIH advisory panel on this matter in 1998.) Other kinds of academic forays into business have also become commonplace. Stanford University has actually started its own brand name product.

Many universities are developing long distance courses that enable the universities to charge tuition to folks who may never interact with faculty who teach the course.

Many of these changes imply further conflict between free access to ideas and controlled access.

What kinds of actions can help us to reclaim the commons? Siva Vaidhyathan, author of *Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How It Threatens Creativity*, and Bollier would both argue that we need to self-consciously use a commons language. Vaidhyathan frames his book to argue that copyright issues are really more about large corporations limiting access to their products and less about the solitary writers/artists/researchers. Rather than thinking and talking about property rights, he suggests thinking and talking about intellectual *policy* NOT intellectual *property*.

Consistent with these actions, Derek Bok urges faculty to carefully consider the issues. He warns that if faculty do not become involved, administrators and financial planners will (because they will be forced into the position). Issues of conflict of interest and the maintenance of norms for the conduct of science must be considered carefully. In times of financial pressure, the danger is that policy will be based upon a series of decisions that only consider the short-run advantage rather than long-term policy and commitment.

All of us are implicated in the actions of our institutions. Whether our universities become cloistered corporations, producing knowledge only for a few or whether they become commons, producing knowledge for the community, is dependent upon our actions now.

References

Siva Vaidhyathan: *Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How it Threatens Creativity*. New York: New York University: 2001.

Derek Bok, "Academic Values and the Lure of Profit," *Chronicle of Higher Education*. April 4, 2003, pp. B7-B9.

David Bollier, *Silent Threat: The Private Plunder of our Common Wealth*. New York. Routledge: 2002

Robert Merton, Social Psychologist—Reflections and Memories

by Carmi Schooler

accurate, the paper does not begin to do full justice to the richness and elegance of Merton's thought. From the point of view of the social psychologist, it is particularly noteworthy that, although his theorizing could readily be extrapolated to the purely sociological level, Merton's approach was at its core social-psychological. The central terms of Merton's conceptualization— status, status set, role set and social structure—were essentially defined in terms of norms and expectations held by individuals. Much of the course of lectures was devoted to examining the psychological processes through which the individual infers social norms and the psychological and social structural mechanisms leading the individual to conform to or deviate from these norms; much less was devoted to the development, structure and interrelationships of social organizations. Thus, although he can also be claimed by the sociological theorists and the sociologists of science and history, we sociological social psychologists can legitimately claim him as one of our own.

In commenting on my attempt to put into writing the theoretical essence of his lectures, one telling point that Merton made was the relevance of his own paper "On the Oral Transmission of Knowledge" (1980) to what I was trying to do. In this paper he discussed the personal and professional characteristics that may lead to important parts of a scholar's work being transmitted primarily orally and the elaborated on the functions and dysfunctions of such "oral discourse" for the scholar and his field. When I read this discourse" for the scholar and his field. When I read this

paper I was left feeling ambivalent. On the one hand, I could not but help being impressed by the breath of the creative thought the paper displayed, the elegance of its literary style and the historical erudition underlying the examples of unwritten scholarly oral transmission it analyzed. On the other hand, I couldn't help but feel that Merton was perfectly cognizant that the obviously undiscussed case of the full body of formal sociological theorizing he only presented in his class lectures was as relevant an example as any. The psychologist in me was left permanently unknowing and bemused. Why was this seemingly so self-confident and assertive of men so reluctant to commit to writing the fully formed social theory that he had developed? It seemed to me then, and still seems to me now, that his not having done so is an irretrievable loss to sociology in general and to social psychology in particular.



Robert K. Merton

References:

Merton, Robert K. 1980. "On the Oral Transmission of Knowledge." Pp. 1-35 in *Sociological Traditions from Generation to Generation*, edited by R.K. Merton and M.W. Riley, Norwood, NJ: Ablex

Schooler, Carmi. 1994. "A working conceptualization of social structure: Mertonian roots and psychological and sociocultural relationships". *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 57: 262-273.

The Social Psychology Section Homepage:

<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~towens/socialpsych>

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Though social psychological concepts make their way into every course I teach (from introductory sociology to research methods to social statistics), two of my courses focus particular attention on the relationship between society and the person.

At the undergraduate level, I first developed an introductory course on “sociological social psychology” while a graduate student at Indiana University. In addition to introducing students to standard social psychological frameworks such as behaviorism, the cognitive perspective, interactionism, and a structural perspective (with primary attention devoted to the latter two, given the focus of the course), I also emphasize C. Wright Mills’ “sociological imagination” in demonstrating how our biographies intersect with larger societal and historical forces. In short, I attempt to get students to think sociologically about even the seemingly most idiosyncratic or individualized aspects of their lives. In pursuing this end, beyond the commonly used mix of classical and contemporary readings, I have found it useful to include film and literature in the curriculum. Films used include: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, to teach theories of deviance (i.e., mental illness) and social control, and *Hoop Dreams*, to explore issues of poverty, race, and the aspiration/achievement gap fostered by that seductive cultural myth of unfettered social mobility we call the “American Dream.” Examples from literature include: Langston Hughes’ prose, used to illustrate the social construction of “race”; excerpts from Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*, used to teach the concepts of prejudice and discrimination; and, George Orwell’s essay “Shooting an Elephant,” used to discuss the presentation of self and the power of roles and social context in shaping behavior. Class meetings include a mix of lecture and small group discussion activities, and students’ learning is assessed using several short papers and formal examinations.

At the graduate level, I have had the opportunity to develop a course (taught twice now) at Northeastern University reflecting my shared interests in both social psychology and the more macro-oriented topics of stratification and race/ethnic relations. Titled “The Social Psychology of Stratification,” this course takes as its basic aim exploring some social psychological dimensions of structured social inequality. A secondary goal is reinforcing the relevance of social psychology for the larger discipline of sociology (and, where possible, demonstrating the existence of social psychological thought and analysis where it is not always recognized or acknowledged). A useful starting point for this exercise is with the origins of sociology itself. Specifically, I highlight the “social psychologies” embedded in the work of the classical social theorists, all of whom were concerned, on some level, with how dominant and/or emergent features of societies were influencing of the typical characteristics of persons. For instance, Durkheim’s notion of “anomie” relates the looseness of

persons’ ties to religious institutions to a lack of internal moral norms; Marx links the economic organization of capitalism to the alienation of workers and the shaping of consciousness; and, Weber links bureaucratization – the dominant organizational feature of modern societies – to processes of depersonalization and, in other work, seeks to demonstrate the role of socially shared ideas as a causal force in history. Following this brief tour of the classics, we explore the literature on sociological social psychology (as contrasted with its psychological cousin), identifying key theoretical frameworks and focusing particular attention to social structure and personality research. Then, building on this foundation, we turn to readings on various social psychological aspects of and/or responses to stratification, including: the self-concept, stratum identification and consciousness, legitimation processes, social reproduction, stratification beliefs, racial attitudes, and links between these phenomena and various policy attitudes and preferences.

Class meetings typically begin with a short lecture on background theory and research germane to the topic for the week. Then, the table is opened to discussion, generally guided by several “thought questions” I pose to students during the week preceding our seminar meeting. In preparation for discussion, students are expected to consider these questions in advance, posting responses to a shared e-mail discussion list prior to our class meeting. During the last two weeks of the seminar, I have experimented with a “mini conference” format, wherein each student is responsible for (1) a brief presentation of one of the readings assigned for the week, and (2) playing the role of discussion leader for that reading. I also require students to pursue independent research resulting in a term paper on a topic reflective of his/her interests (and which is clearly related to the theme of the course). This assignment asks students to respond to two questions (first posed to me in a seminar taught by Sheldon Stryker; the teaching lives on): (1) What is the existing state of knowledge with respect to the selected topic (i.e., what do we currently know)? (2) What theoretical and empirical issues remain to be resolved with respect to the topic (i.e., what opportunities exist for someone interested in contributing to knowledge in this research area)?



Violence and Gender Reexamined

I appreciate the invitation to write a column for this newsletter since it gives me the opportunity to plug my new book: *Violence and Gender Reexamined* (APA Books). We bought a more expensive house when we moved to State College and I'm worried about the mortgage. The book is selling fine, but I was hoping for more. My goal is to change the study of violence against women. This is not conceit: I compare myself to the little boy who said that the Emperor has no clothes—naïve not smart.

It's not rocket science, it's not even network analysis. One measures some characteristic of violent incidents: whether the offender had a control motive or not; whether the incident was reported to the police or not. Then regress it on the gender of the offender, the gender of the victim, whether the offender is the victim's spouse, and then throw in a gender x spouse interaction term. The results show how violence against women or wives is or is not special. For example, are men who assault their wives more likely to be motivated by a desire for control than women who assault their husbands or men who assault men? Are their offenses less likely to be reported to the police or are their victims more likely to be blamed? Is violence involving heterosexual couples different in motive than violence involving homosexual couples? Is couple violence different from other violence, regardless of gender? To ask these questions and to estimate these equations are to open Pandora's box.

The specialized study of violence against women reflects tunnel vision. We should include all kinds of violence in our designs and then determine how violence against women is special. There *are* special characteristics of male violence against women. For example, it is more likely than other violence to involve family members and it is more likely to involve sexual coercion. But do men who assault their wives have different motives than men who assault strangers and are we more tolerant of violence against women? These comparisons are odious from an ideological perspective, but necessary from a scientific perspective.

The central theme of my book is that violence against women should be understood as violence, *not* sexism. Violence is violence, regardless of the target. To understand it we should rely on theories of violence and aggression, not theories of sexism. Misogyny plays at most a trivial role in leading to violence toward women. Typically, men who commit rape or assault their wives commit other crimes as well and have similar attitudes toward women as do other criminals. They are selfish, not sexist. If offenders attacked people randomly wouldn't half their victims be women?

Sexism—defined as traditional attitudes toward women—actually inhibits violence against women. Men are bigger and much more violent than women, and big people hit little people. Yet women are *less* likely to be the victim of violence than men and, during a verbal conflict, men are *less* likely to hit their wives than they are to hit men. If we are interested in gender differences

in victimization, we need to explain men's greater victimization, not women's. Ask not why men hit women, ask why they don't do it more often.

Chivalry is the answer. The norm leads men to protect women, not harm them, and it leads to the perception that hitting a woman is worse than hitting a man. Of course a woman who violates gender roles (or engages in any deviant act) is less likely to receive protection; a man who violates gender roles is treated even worse. Chivalry is alive and well in modern societies, even among liberal social scientists offended by its image of female dependence. And a coalition of activists and chivalrous conservatives has produced mandatory arrest laws and other punitive measures in response to violence against women, and a decline in concern for civil liberties.

Beliefs in male dominance may play some role in spousal violence, but that role is trivial, at least in western countries. Evidence suggests that wives are just as controlling as husbands, although husbands use violence more often for this purpose. Women may have less structural power than men in the larger society, but research on decision-making shows that they have just as much power as their husbands in their marriages.

Attitudes about violence against wives were similar in the past to attitudes today, according to Elizabeth Pleck's historical evidence. There never was a rule of thumb regulating the size of the stick that husbands could use to beat their wives. What has changed is our concern for privacy and our attitudes toward state intervention. It was the privacy of family life, not belief in male dominance that sometimes led to toleration of some forms of domestic violence. The state was reluctant to intervene in domestic violence against children as well.

What about motives for rape? Everyone but sociologists knows what men want. On a Saturday night, young men don't sit around thinking about finding a woman to boss around. Sex differences in sexuality are dramatic and they inevitably affect sexual supply and demand. There is considerable evidence that rape is often sexually motivated. For example, rapists overwhelmingly target young women, controlling for opportunity factors. In addition, date rape offenders have higher sexual aspirations than other college males: they masturbate more often and they use a variety of methods to encourage women to have sex.

Rapists are no more likely than other criminals are to escape punishment and the punishments are severe. Female victims of rape are assigned less blame than male victims of rape and there is reason to believe that rape victims are assigned less blame than assault victims. There are a few tribal societies where rape is used for social control for certain offenses, but in most societies rapists are criminals not agents of male-dominated governments.

Perhaps I have exaggerated things: perhaps the Emperor is partially dressed and not completely naked. This should be an empirical not an ideological issue. One can oppose sexism without insisting it is responsible for violence against women. Just merge the data, run the equations, and examine how violence against women is special. But first, get tenure.



GRADUATE STUDENT PROFILE

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Tim Hallett is completing his dissertation at Northwestern University, and will be an assistant professor at Indiana University in the fall. His primary interests are social interaction, power, and turmoil, with additional interests in “sociological miniaturism,” emotions, and organizations (particularly schools).

Tim’s dissertation is entitled “Symbolic Power and the Social Organization of Turmoil.” Though we tend to think of turmoil as inherently chaotic, Tim argues that, to the contrary, turmoil is highly organized. Using data collected through interviews with 84 teachers at 8 Chicago Public Elementary Schools and a two-ethnographic study of “Costen Elementary,” he argues that the organization of turmoil is four-fold: First, turmoil is precipitated by a change in the broader context in which the setting exists. Second, turmoil is instigated by pointed disruptions in an established social order. These disruptions are phenomenologically unsettling: They violate the established patterns of thought and action through which participants exercise control over the setting. Third, turmoil is enabled by authority relations that allow disruptions to persist. Fourth, turmoil is defined by symbolic power relations. As the power to define reality, symbolic power is of dual importance in the organization of turmoil. Armed with symbolic power, one can define an intervention in the social order as legitimate, and thereby circumvent conflict and turmoil. However, the responses of others are also of consequence, and respondents with symbolic power can use it to define a line of resistance, thereby articulating turmoil. Each of these organizational

conditions come together in the social interactions between people, and these interactions constitute the emergent turmoil.

Tim’s interest in social interaction can be traced to an undergraduate course at the College of Wooster (Ohio), where he read “The Managed Heart” and “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life” while interrogating his experiences as a waiter. In graduate school, he used data from an ethnographic study of a restaurant to turn these interests into a masters thesis and a forthcoming article (“Emotional Feedback and Amplification in Social Interaction—*Sociological Quarterly*). Though most work on emotions focuses on the initial evocation of an emotion, Tim’s article takes a second step by exploring the ongoing interactions through which emotions “blow-up.” This paper received the Sociology of Emotions Graduate Student Paper Award.

Statement: The problems of order and the organization of society are fundamental pillars on which sociological thought has been built. In some form or another, explicitly or implicitly, all sociologists engage these issues, though with different assumptions and perspectives. As an area of sociology that is sympathetic to both structural and quantitative approaches as well as more micro, qualitative, interactionist approaches, social psychology is an especially fertile ground for intellectual growth as we grapple with the problems of order and organization that broadly define us as sociologists.

Wanted!

Newsletter Editor

Social Psychology Section Newsletter, 2003

Interested in editing the newsletter?

For information, contact Carmi Schooler or Jane Sell



Peter J. Burke to be presented with the Cooley-Mead Award in 2003!

**89th ANNUAL MEETING OF
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NEWBOOK!

Jeylan T. Mortimer (2003) "Working and Growing Up in America."
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. ISBN 0-674-00923-1

Book Jacket Notes:

"Should teenagers have jobs while they're in high school? Doesn't working distract them from schoolwork, cause long-term problem behaviors, and precipitate a "precocious" transition to adulthood? This report from a remarkable longitudinal study of 1,000 students, followed from the beginning of high school through their mid-twenties, answers, resoundingly, in favor of jobs. Examining a broad range of teenagers, Jeylan Mortimer concludes that high school students who work even as much as half time are better off in many ways that students who don't have jobs at all. Having part time jobs can increase confidence, foster time management skills, promote vocational exploration, and enhance academic success. The wider social circle of adults teens meet through their jobs can also buffer strains at home, and some of what young people learn on the job—not least responsibility and confidence—gives them an advantage in later work life."

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

MIDUS (Midlife in the United States) Pilot Grant Program

Application deadline: July 1, 2003

Award notification: August 1, 2003

Two pilot project grants will be awarded for innovative interdisciplinary research on adult health and well-being, with an emphasis on integrative approaches to understanding life course and subgroup variations in physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive functioning. All research must be based on the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) data set, as well as its satellite studies including the National Study of Daily Experiences (NSDE) and sibling/twin subsample studies. Grants of up to \$15,000 will be awarded to investigators from a variety of disciplines. For detailed information on the pilot grant program and application process, see:

http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~carrds/midus/midus_home.htm

Applications should be sent NO LATER than July 1, 2003 to: Dr. Deborah Carr, Institute for Health, Health Care Policy & Aging Research, Rutgers University, 30 College Ave., New Brunswick, NJ 08901. For further information, call 732-932-4068, or send e-mail to carrds@rci.rutgers.edu.

Correction from the Winter Newsletter:

A correction to the article about Robert K. Shelly's research on sentiments, emotion, and status processes:

Murray Webster and Martha Foschi were co-organizers of the conference at the University of South Carolina in 1984, and both were also co-editors of the volume produced from the conference: STATUS GENERALIZATION published by Stanford University Press.

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