Social Structure and Social Interaction

Zoran Milich/Masterfile

Intertwining Forces: Social Structure and Social Interaction

Most people who become sociologists do so because they are interested in studying particular social problems, such as homelessness, mental illness, or racial inequality. Each of these problems has roots in and consequences for both broad social structures and everyday social interactions. For example, racial inequality in the United States in part stems from the nature of our national economy and political institutions: There simply aren't enough well-paying jobs near nonwhite communities, and these communities rarely have enough political power to entice corporations to bring in good jobs. But racial inequality is also reinforced on a day-to-day basis whenever teachers spend less time with nonwhite than with white students or police officers assume that nonwhites are more likely than whites to be criminals. As this example suggests, to fully understand society and social problems, sociologists must look at both social structure and social interaction. This chapter describes these two basic features of society. As we will see, research on social structures often draws on structural-functionalist or conflict theories, whereas research on social interaction typically draws on symbolic interaction theory.

Social Structures

Many of our daily encounters occur in patterns. Every day we interact with the same people (our family or best friends) or with the same kinds of people (salesclerks or teachers). These patterned relationships are called social structures. Each of these dramas has a set of actors (mother/child or buyer/seller) and a set of norms that define appropriate behavior for each actor.

As described in Chapter 1, a social structure is a recurrent pattern of relationships. Social structures can be found at all levels in society. Baseball games, friendship networks, families, and large corporations all have patterns of relationships that repeat day after day. Some of these patterns are reinforced by formal rules or laws, but many more are maintained by force of custom.

The patterns in our lives are both constraining and enabling (Giddens 1984). If you would like to be free to set your own schedule, you will find the 9-to-5, Monday-to-Friday work pattern a constraint. On the other hand, preset patterns provide convenient and comfortable ways of handling many aspects of life. They help us to navigate heavy traffic, find dates and spouses, and raise our children.

Whether we are talking about a Saturday afternoon ball game, families, or the workplace, social structures can be analyzed in terms of three concepts: *status*, *role*, and *institution*.

Status

The basic building block of society is **status**—a person's position in a group, relative to other group members. Sociologists who want to study the status structure of a society examine two types of statuses: achieved and ascribed. An **achieved status** is a position (good or bad) that a person can attain in a lifetime. Being a father is an achieved status; so is being a convict. An **ascribed status** is a position generally assumed to be fixed by birth or inheritance and unalterable in a person's lifetime. For example, although

A **status** is a specialized position within a group.

An **achieved status** is optional, one that a person can obtain in a lifetime.

An **ascribed status** is fixed by birth and inheritance and is unalterable in a person's lifetime.

MAP 4.1: Mixed-Race People in the United States

About 2 percent of U.S. residents—and 4 percent of U.S. children—belong to two or more races. The number of mixed-race people per 1,000 people varies enormously from state to state. This map does *not* reflect the rising number of individuals who are part Hispanic because Hispanics are not considered a race.

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census (2009b).
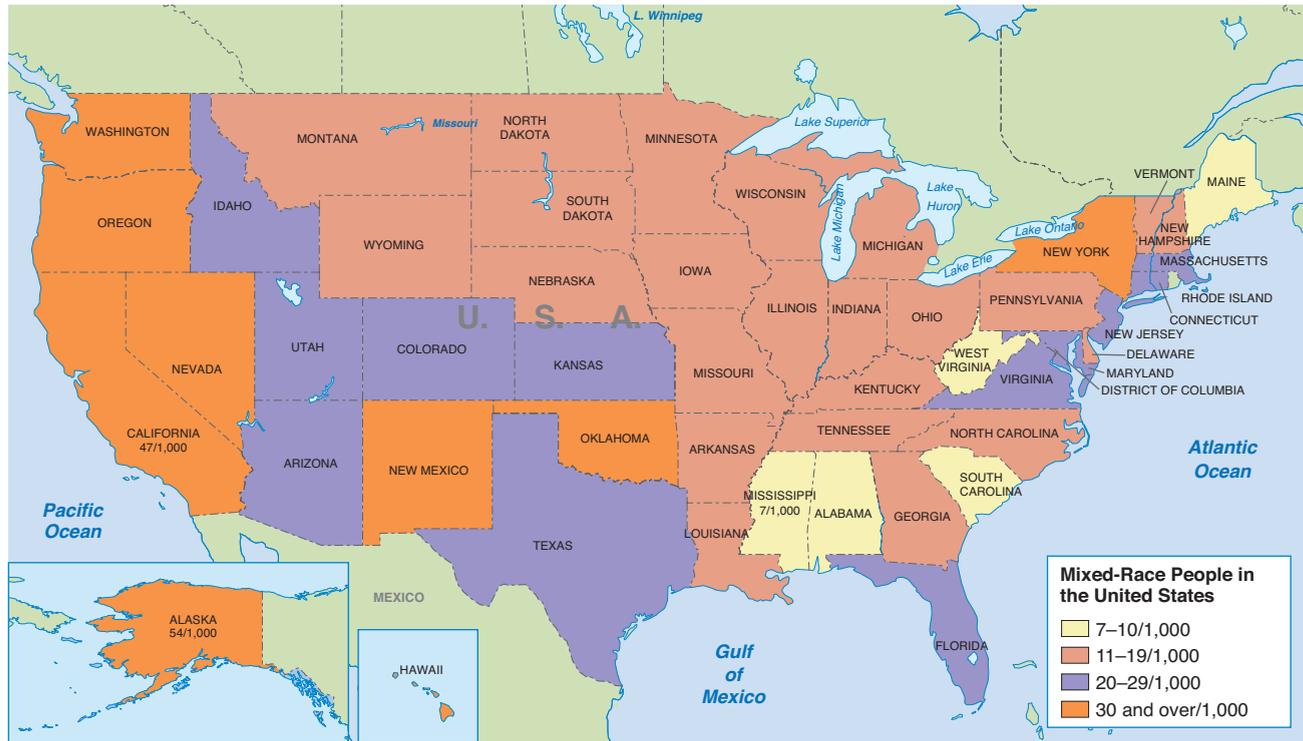
some people have gender reassignment surgery and some people "pass" as members of a different race, we assume that sex and race are unchangeable. Hence sociologists generally consider sex and race to be ascribed statuses.

Each individual holds multiple statuses simultaneously. You may be a daughter or son as well as an athlete, a Christian, a waiter, and so on. This combination of statuses is referred to as your **status set**.

Sociologists who analyze the status structure of a society typically focus on four related issues (Blau 1987): (1) identifying the number and types of statuses that are available in a society; (2) assessing the distribution of people among these statuses; (3) determining how the consequences—the rewards, resources, and opportunities—differ for people who occupy one status rather than another; and (4) ascertaining what combinations of statuses are likely or even possible.

Case Study: Race as a Status

To illustrate how our lives are structured by status membership, we apply this approach to one particular ascribed status and ask how being African American affects relationships and experiences in the United States.

To begin: How many racial statuses are there in the United States? The 1990 census asked Americans to identify themselves as belonging to one of five racial

Status set refers to the combination of all statuses held by an individual.

categories: white, African American, Native American, Asian, or other. For years, this same question with more or less the same list of possible answers appeared on almost every social survey. The 2000 census, however, allowed individuals to choose more than one race, thus creating the category *mixed race*; Map 4.1 shows the distribution of mixed-race people across the United States. The nearly universal concern about racial statuses alerts us to the importance of racial status in our daily lives, while the addition of the mixed-race category suggests that racial statuses—and ideas about racial statuses—do change. This concept is explored more fully in Decoding the Data: American Diversity.

It is not just the number of statuses that has consequences. The numerical distribution of the population among racial statuses also encourages or discourages certain patterns of behavior. For example, according to the latest U.S. Census, 2.1 million African Americans live in New York City, but only 3 live in Worland, Wyoming. Consequently, white New Yorkers have a far greater chance, statistically, of marrying an African American than do white residents of Worland.

Of course, numbers alone do not tell the whole story. By nearly every measure that one might choose, there is substantial inequality in the rewards, resources, and

decoding the data

American Diversity

Some surveys ask people to select the one racial group that best describes them. Some allow people to select more than one racial group, and some also ask individuals whether or not they are Hispanic (which is not considered a racial group). These U.S. Census data illustrate the different answers we get from these different questions.

The Short Answer	Percentage	A Longer Answer	Percentage
White	75.1	White Non-Hispanic	69.1
		Hispanic	12.5
African American	12.3	African American Non-Hispanic	12.1
Native American	0.9	Native American	0.7
Asian American	3.6	Asian American	3.6
Other	8.0	Other	0.3
		Mixed Race	1.6

Explaining the Data: What sociological factors—peer pressure, family ties, socialization, cultural norms—do you think would lead someone like Barack Obama, whose mother was a white American and whose father was an African, to identify as African American?

Critiquing the Data: Compare the data in these two graphs. How does allowing individuals to choose more than one race affect our image of race in America? How does combining data on race with data on Hispanic identity affect our image of American diversity?

Although racial inequality continues to plague the United States, the election of President Barack Obama demonstrates that it is possible for African Americans to succeed in this country.

Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images News/Getty Images

opportunities available to African American and white people in the United States. Of course, African Americans can succeed, as the election of President Barack Obama amply demonstrated. Nevertheless, compared to whites, African Americans are twice as likely to die in infancy, twice as likely to be unemployed, and *six* times more likely to be murdered (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2009a). Similarly, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, African Americans were far more likely than white residents to stay in the city. The cause was poverty: African Americans were far less likely than others to have transportation out of the city, money to rent hotel rooms elsewhere, and well-off relatives with large homes who could take them in for an extended stay. Obviously, racial status has enormous consequences on the structures of daily experiences.

Although racial inequality persists, racial status does not correspond as directly with occupational and educational statuses as it once did, and different combinations of statuses are possible. Forty years ago, being African American meant probably having much less education and a much lower status occupation than whites. Today, knowing a person's ascribed status (race) is not such an accurate guide to his or her achieved statuses (education or occupation). Nevertheless, 34 percent of all nurse's aides in the United States are African American, compared to only 6 percent of all physicians (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2009a). The processes through which these overlapping racial, political, and economic statuses are maintained are discussed further in Chapter 8.

Roles

Social interaction refers to the ways individuals interact with others in everyday, face-to-face situations.

The status structure of a society provides the broad outlines for **social interaction**: the ways individuals interact with others in everyday, face-to-face situations.

These broad outlines are filled in by roles. As described in Chapter 1, roles are sets of norms that specify the rights and obligations of each status. To use a theatrical metaphor, the status structure is equivalent to the cast of characters ("a young girl, her father, and their maid," for example), whereas roles are equivalent to the scripts that define how the characters ought to act, feel, and relate to one another. This language of the theater helps to make a vital point about the relationship between status and role: People occupy statuses, but they play roles. This distinction is helpful when we analyze how structures work in practice—and why they sometimes don't work. A man may occupy the status of father, but he may play the role associated with it poorly.

Sometimes people fail to fulfill role requirements despite their best intentions. It is hard to be a good provider, for instance, when there are no jobs available. Failure is also particularly likely when people face incompatible demands because of multiple or complex roles. Sociologists distinguish between two types of incompatible role demands: When incompatible role demands develop within a single status, we refer to **role strain**; when they develop because of multiple statuses, we refer to **role conflict**. For example, role strain occurs when parents don't have enough time to wash their children's clothes, cook their dinner, help them with homework, and play a game together all in the same evening. Role conflict occurs when a parent's need to take time off to care for a sick child conflicts with an employer's expectation that the parent put work obligations ahead of family obligations.

As this suggests, social roles are always changing and flexible. We do not simply play the parts we are assigned with machinelike conformity. Instead, each of us plays a given role differently, depending on our other social statuses and roles, our resources, and the social rewards or punishments that our role performances evoke from others.

Institutions

Social structures vary in scope and importance. Some, such as those that pattern a Friday night poker game, have limited application. The players could change the game to Saturday night or up the ante, and it would not have a major effect on the lives of anyone other than members of the group. If a major corporation changed seniority or family leave policies, it would have somewhat broader consequences, not only affecting employees of that firm but also setting a precedent for other firms. Still, the impact of change in this one corporation (or social structure) would likely be limited to certain sorts of businesses. In contrast, changes in other social structures have the power to shape the basic fabric of all our lives. We call these structures social institutions.

An **institution** is an enduring and complex social structure that meets basic human needs. Its primary features are that it endures for generations; includes a complex set of values, norms, statuses, and roles; and addresses basic human needs. Embedded in the statuses and roles of the family institution, for example, are enduring patterns for dating and courtship, child rearing, and care of the elderly. Because the institution of family consists of millions of separate families, however, the exact rules and behaviors surrounding dating or elder care will vary.

Despite these variations, institutions provide routine patterns for dealing with predictable problems of social life. Because these problems tend to be similar across societies, we find that every society tends to have the same types of institutions.

sociology and you

Many college students experience role conflict due to the multiple roles they play. Your teachers expect you to turn in papers on time, but your boss expects you to work overtime. If you are on a team, your coach expects you to get enough sleep, but your friends expect you to go out and party. If you sometimes feel there aren't enough hours in the day, you are probably experiencing role conflict.

Role strain occurs when incompatible role demands develop within a single status.

Role conflict occurs when incompatible role demands develop because of multiple statuses.

An **institution** is an enduring social structure that meets basic human needs.

Religion is one of the basic social institutions. Although doctrines and rituals vary enormously, all cultures and societies include a structured pattern of behavior and belief that provides individuals with explanations for events and experiences that are beyond their own personal control.

Basic Institutions

Five basic social institutions are:

- The family, to care for dependents and rear children.
- The economy, to produce and distribute goods.
- Government, to provide community coordination and defense.
- Education, to train new generations.
- Religion, to supply answers about the unknown or unknowable.

These institutions are basic in the sense that every society provides some set of enduring social arrangements designed to meet these important social needs. These arrangements may vary from one society to the next, sometimes dramatically. Government institutions may be monarchies, democracies, dictatorships, or tribal councils. However, a stable social structure that is responsible for meeting these needs is common to all healthy societies.

In simple societies, all of these important social needs—political, economic, educational, and religious—are met through one major social institution, the family or kinship group. Social relationships based on kinship obligations serve as a basis for organizing production, reproduction, education, and defense.

As societies grow larger and more complex, the kinship structure is less able to furnish solutions to all the recurrent problems. As a result, some activities gradually shift to more specialized social structures outside the family. The economy, education, religion, and government become fully developed institutionalized structures that exist separately from the family. (The institutions of the contemporary United States are the subjects of Chapters 10 to 13.)

As the social and physical environments of a society change and the technology for dealing with those environments expands or contracts, the problems that individuals face also change. Thus, institutional structures are not static; new structures emerge to cope with new problems—or a society will collapse into chaos (Diamond 2005). For example, the African country of Uganda responded actively to the AIDS epidemic, providing public education on safer sex, access to condoms, and access to treatment for those already infected. As a result, its economy has held steady despite the effect of the disease. In contrast, the South African government rejected modern understandings of the disease and its prevention. Rates of AIDS infection have soared, and families, schools, and the economy are collapsing.

Institutional Interdependence

Each institution of society can be analyzed as an independent social structure, but none really stands alone. Instead, institutions are interdependent; each affects the others and is affected by them.

In a stable society, the norms and values embodied in the roles of one institution will usually be compatible with those in other institutions. For example, a society that stresses male dominance and rule by seniority in the family will also stress the same norms in its religious, economic, and political systems. In this case, interdependence reinforces norms and values and adds to social stability.

Sometimes, however, interdependence is an important mechanism for social change. Because each institution affects and is affected by the others, a change in one

tends to lead to change in the others. Changes in the economy lead to changes in the family; changes in religion lead to changes in government. For example, when years of schooling become more important than hereditary position in determining occupation, hereditary position will also be endangered in government, the family, and religion.

Institutions as Agents of Stability or Inequality

Sociologists use two major theoretical frameworks to approach the study of social structures: structural functionalism and conflict theory. The first focuses on the part that institutions play in creating social and personal stability; the second focuses on the role of institutions in legitimizing inequality. Because each framework places a different value judgment on stability and order, each prompts us to ask different questions about social structures.

Structural-functional theorists begin with the question "How do institutions help to stabilize a society?" To answer this question, they focus on the ready-made, shared patterns for responding to everyday problems that institutions offer. By keeping us from having to reinvent the social equivalent of the wheel with each new encounter and each new generation, structural functionalists argue, these patterns and the institutions that underlie them allow social life to run smoothly in stable and predictable ways. Moreover, because these patterns have been sanctified by tradition, we tend to experience them as morally right. As a result, we find satisfaction and security in social institutions.

In contrast, although conflict theorists acknowledge that institutions meet basic human needs, they raise the question "Why this social pattern rather than another?" Their answers typically emphasize who benefits from existing institutions and illustrate how institutions support the interests of those already in power. Because institutions have existed for a long time, we tend to think of our familial, religious, and political systems not merely as one way of fulfilling a particular need but as the only acceptable way. Just as an eleventh-century Christian might have thought, "Of course witches should be burned at the stake," so we tend to think, "Of course women should sacrifice their careers for their children." In both cases, the cloak of tradition obscures our ability to recognize inequalities, making inequality seem normal and even desirable. As a result, conflict theorists argue that institutions stifle social change and help maintain inequality.

Types of Societies

Institutions give a society a distinctive character. In some societies, the church is the dominant institution; in others, it is the family or the economy. Whatever the circumstance, recognizing the institutional framework of a society is critical to understanding how it works.

Societies range greatly in complexity. In simple societies, we often find only one major social institution—the family or kinship group. Complex, modern societies, however, have as many as a dozen institutions. What causes this expansion of institutions? The triggering event appears to be economic change. When changes in technology, physical environment, access to resources, or social arrangements increase economic surpluses, institutions are often able to expand (Lenski 1966; Diamond 1997). In this section we sketch a broad outline of the institutional evolution that accompanied four revolutions in production.

In hunting-and-gathering societies like that of the Kung Bushmen, tasks tend to be divided along gender lines. Individuals accumulate few personal possessions because there is little surplus and because possessions would be difficult to move.

Hunting-and-Gathering Societies

Hunting-and-gathering societies are those in which people have little or no means of obtaining food other than killing wild animals or finding edible fruits, vegetables, seeds, and the like (Lee & Daly 2005). These societies are based on subsistence economies, in which people rarely can obtain or store more food than they can eat. In some years, game and fruit are plentiful, but in many years scarcity is a constant companion.

The basic units of social organization in hunting-and-gathering societies are the household and the local band, both of which are based primarily on kinship. Most hunting-and-gathering societies are organized around these units. A band rarely exceeds 50 people in size and tends to be nomadic or semi-nomadic. Because of their frequent wanderings, members of these societies accumulate few personal possessions.

The division of labor is simple, based on age and sex (Lee & Daly 1999). The common pattern is for older boys and men (other than the elderly) to participate in hunting and deep-sea fishing and for older girls and women to participate in gathering, shore fishing, and preserving. Aside from inequalities of status by age and sex, few structured inequalities exist in subsistence economies. Members possess little wealth; they have few, if any, hereditary privileges; and the societies are almost always too small to develop class distinctions. In fact, a major characteristic of subsistence societies is that individuals are homogeneous, or alike. Apart from differences occasioned by age and sex, members generally have the same everyday experiences.

All human societies originated as hunting-and-gathering societies, but few remain. Those that do are found in places like the Great Victoria Desert of Australia and the Amazon jungle. They have survived both because they have learned over the generations how to use all the resources these environments offer and because few outsiders have any interest in taking over these harsh environments.

Horticultural Societies

Around the world, the movement away from hunting-and-gathering societies began with the development of agriculture. During this "first revolution" in agriculture, people began to plant and cultivate crops, rather than simply harvesting whatever nature provided. This led to the development of **horticultural societies**—that is, societies based on small-scale, simple farming, without plows or large beasts of burden. With only digging sticks or hoes to help, horticultural societies could not grow much food. But unlike hunting-and-gathering societies, they occasionally could grow enough to have surplus food.

Once societies could grow more than they needed to survive, they changed dramatically. Although peasants still had to work full time to produce food, others—higher up on the newly emerging class hierarchy—could now live off the surplus produced by those peasants. This privileged group could now take time off from basic production and turn to other pursuits: art, religion, writing, and frequently warfare.

Because of relative abundance and a settled way of life, horticultural societies tend to develop complex and stable institutions outside the family. Some economic activity may occur outside the family, a religious structure with full-time priests may develop, and a stable system of government—complete with bureaucrats, tax collectors, and a hereditary ruler—often develops. Such societies are sometimes very large. The Inca Empire, for example, had an estimated population of more than 4 million.

Hunting-and-gathering societies are those in which most food must be obtained by killing wild animals or finding edible plants.

Horticultural societies are characterized by small-scale, simple farming, without plows or large beasts of burden.

Agricultural Societies

Approximately 5,000 to 6,000 years ago, a second agricultural revolution occurred, and the efficiency of food production was doubled and redoubled through better technology (Diamond 1997). We use the term **agricultural societies** to refer to those whose economies are based on growing food using plows and large beasts of burden.

The shift to agricultural societies was accompanied by improvements in technology such as the use of metal tools, the wheel, and better methods of irrigation and fertilization. These changes dramatically altered social institutions. Most importantly, these changes meant that fewer people were needed to produce food. As a result, some could instead move to large urban centers and find work in the growing number of new trades. Meanwhile, technology, trade, reading and writing, science, and art grew rapidly as larger and larger numbers of people could now devote full time to these pursuits.

At the same time, growing occupational diversity also brought greater inequality. In the place of the rather simple class structure of horticultural societies, a complex class system developed, with merchants, soldiers, scholars, officials, and kings—and, of course, the poor peasants who comprised the bulk of the population and on whose labor the rest all ultimately depended.

One of the common uses to which societies put their new leisure time and other new technology was warfare. With the domestication of the horse (cavalry) and the invention of the wheel (chariot warfare), military technology became more advanced and efficient. Military might was used as a means to gain greater surplus through conquering other peoples. The Romans were so successful at this that they managed to turn the peoples of the entire Mediterranean basin into a peasant class that supported a ruling elite in Italy.

Industrial Societies

The third major revolution in production was the advent of industrialization about 200 years ago in Western Europe. **Industrial societies** are those whose economies are built primarily around the mass production of nonagricultural goods using mechanical, electrical, or fossil-fuel energy. The shift from human and animal labor to mass production caused an explosive rise in cities and transformed political, social, and economic institutions. Old institutions such as education expanded dramatically, and new institutions such as science, medicine, and law emerged.

The shift to industrial societies occurred in tandem with a shift from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* (Wirth 1938). **Gemeinschaft** refers to societies in which people share close personal bonds with most of those around them. In contrast, **gesellschaft** refers to societies in which people are tied primarily by impersonal, practical bonds. This shift began with the development of agricultural societies and intensified as the move from farms to factories and cities increased.

Postindustrial Societies

During the last few decades, wealthy countries like the United States have experienced a rapid shift toward a *postindustrial society*. Whereas industrial societies are characterized by the mass production of goods such as clothes, cars, and computers, **postindustrial societies** are characterized by a focus on producing either *information* or *services*. Postindustrial jobs include researcher, doctor, and software developer as well as maid, store clerk, and Wal-Mart greeter. Meanwhile, industrial production (such as

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Industrial societies are characterized by mass production of nonagricultural goods.

Gemeinschaft refers to societies in which most people share close personal bonds.

Gesellschaft refers to societies in which people are tied primarily by impersonal, practical bonds.

Postindustrial societies focus on producing either information or services.

manufacturing clothing and computers) has increasingly shifted to poorer countries like Bangladesh and Peru.

The shift to a postindustrial society is changing the relative strength of social institutions. Since jobs in the postindustrial world divide much more sharply between well-paying jobs requiring four or more years of higher education and poorly paying jobs for everyone else, education has become far more important. Similarly, information technology now has enormous impact on all social institutions, affecting how we communicate with our family, participate in religion, acquire an education, and so on.

Case Study: When Institutions Die

Throughout most of history, changes in production, reproduction, education, and social control occurred slowly. When these changes occurred gradually and harmoniously, institutions could continue to support one another and to provide stable patterns that met ongoing human needs. On other occasions, however, old institutions—along with old roles and statuses—disappear before new ones can evolve. When this happens, societies and the individuals within them are traumatized and may fall apart.

In 1985, Anastasia Shkilnyk chronicled just such a human tragedy in her book *A Poison Stronger Than Love.* Although the book focuses on the plight of the Ojibway Indians of Northwestern Ontario, it provides a useful framework for understanding the fate of many traditional societies faced with rapid social change.

A Broken Society

In 1976, Shkilnyk was sent by the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs to Grassy Narrows, an Ojibway community of 520 people, to advise the community on how to alleviate economic disruption caused by mercury poisoning in nearby lakes and rivers. Grassy Narrows was a destroyed community. Drunken 6-year-olds roamed winter streets when the temperatures were 40 degrees below zero. The death rate for both children and adults was very high compared with that for the rest of Canada. Nearly three-quarters of all deaths were linked directly to alcohol and drug abuse. A quote from Shkilnyk's journal evokes the tragedy of life in Grassy Narrows:

> *Friday.* My neighbor comes over to tell me that last night, just before midnight, she found 4-year-old Dolores wandering alone around the reserve, about 2 miles from her home. She called the police and they went to the house to investigate. They found Dolores's 3-year-old sister, Diane, huddled in a corner crying. The house was empty, bare of food, and all the windows were broken. The police discovered that the parents had gone to Kenora the day before and were drinking in town. Both of them were sober when they deserted their children. (Shkilnyk 1985, 41)

Like Dolores and Diane's parents, most of the adults in Grassy Narrows were binge drinkers. When wages were paid or the welfare checks came, many drank until they were unconscious and the money ran out. Often children waited until their parents had drunk themselves unconscious and then drank the liquor that was left. If they could not get liquor, they sniffed glue or gasoline.

Yet 20 years before, the Ojibway had been a thriving people. How was a society so thoroughly destroyed?

Ojibway Society before 1963

The Ojibway have been in contact with whites for two centuries. In 1873, they signed the treaty that defined their relationship with the Canadian government and established the borders of their reservation.

In the decades that followed, the Ojibway continued their traditional lives as hunters and gatherers. The family was their primary social institution. A family group could consist of a group of brothers plus their wives and children or of a couple, their unmarried children, their married sons, and the wives and children of those sons. In either case, the houses or tents of this family group would all be clustered together, perhaps as far as a half mile from the next family group.

Family groups carried out all economic activities. These activities varied with the season. In the late summer and fall, families picked blueberries and harvested wild rice; in the winter, they hunted and trapped. In all these endeavors, the entire family participated, with everybody packing up and going to where the work was. The men would hunt and trap, the women would skin and prepare the meat, and the old people would come along to care for and teach the children. The reserve served only as a summer encampment. From late summer until late spring, the family was on the move.

Besides being the chief economic and educational unit, the family was also the major agent of social control. Family elders enforced the rules and punished those who violated them. In addition, most religious ceremonies were performed by family elders. Although a loose band of families formed the Ojibway society, each family group was largely self-sufficient, interacting with other family groups only to exchange marriage partners and for other ceremonial activities.

The earliest changes brought by white culture did not disrupt this way of life particularly. Even the development of boarding schools, which removed many Indian children from their homes for the winter months, had only a limited effect on Ojibway life: The boarding schools took the children away but did not disrupt the major social institutions of the society they left behind. When the children returned home each summer, their families could still educate them into Ojibway culture and social structure.

The Change

In 1963, however, the government decided that the Ojibway should be brought into modern society and given the benefits thereof: modern plumbing, better health care, roads, and the like. To this end, they moved the entire Ojibway community from the old reserve to a government-built new community about 4 miles from their traditional encampment. The new community had houses, roads, schools, and easy access to "civilization." The differences between the new and the old were sufficient to destroy the fragile interdependence of Ojibway institutions.

First, all the houses were close together in neat rows, assigned randomly without regard for family group. As a result, the kinship group ceased to exist as a physical unit. Second, the replacement of boarding schools with a local community school meant that mothers had to stay home with the children instead of going out on the trap line. As a result, adult women overnight became consumers rather than producers, shattering their traditional relationships with their husbands and community. Because women and children could no longer leave home, men had to go out alone on the trap line. And because the men disliked leaving their families behind, they cut their trapping trips from several weeks to a few days, and trapping ceased to be a way of life for the whole family. The productivity of the Ojibway reached bottom in May 1970 when

the government ordered the tribe to halt all fishing after pollution from a white-owned paper mill had caused mercury levels in the reservation's rivers to reach dangerous levels. Because of all these changes, the community became heavily dependent on government aid rather than on themselves or on each other.

The result was the total destruction of the old patterns of doing things—that is, of social roles, statuses, and institutions. The relationships between husbands and wives were no longer clear. What were their rights and obligations to each other now that their joint economic productivity had ended? What were their rights and obligations to their children when no one cared about tomorrow?

The Future of the Ojibway

In 1985, the Ojibway finally reached a $16.7 million out-of-court settlement with the government and the paper mill to compensate for damages to their way of life arising from both government policies and mercury pollution. However, environmental pollution remains a serious health and economic problem (Envirowatch 2006). In addition, mining and clear-cutting of the land by outside corporations now pose new threats to the tribe and its environment. Nevertheless, Ojibway society has begun the process of healing and recovery. It is developing school programs to teach young people the Ojibway language, using money from the settlement to develop local industries that will provide an ongoing basis for a productive and thriving society, and it is organizing politically against these new threats to its environment, health, and culture (Envirowatch 2006; Turtle Island Native Network News 2009). In the process, it is rebuilding old social institutions and creating new ones.

A Sociological Response

Unfortunately, the Ojibway are not an exceptional case. Their tragedy has been played out in tribe after tribe, band after band, all over North America. In some tribes alcoholism touches nearly every family. Compared with other Americans, Native

Both on their reservation and in front of Canada's Parliament, members of the Ojibway community continue to protest against clear-cutting and other forms of environmental devastation at Grassy Narrows.

Mike Casses/Reuters/Landov

American youths and adults are about twice as likely to report abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs (NHSDA Report 2003). As a result, they are significantly more likely to die from chronic liver disease, cirrhosis, accidents, homicide, and suicide (National Center for Health Statistics 2009). In addition, experts estimate that methamphetamine abuse is now twice as common on Indian reservations as elsewhere in the country (Wagner 2006).

High levels of alcohol and drug use are health problems, economic problems, and social problems. Among the related issues are fetal alcohol syndrome, child and spouse abuse, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, nonmarital births, and divorce. How can these interrelated problems be addressed? To paraphrase C. Wright Mills (see Chapter 1), when one or two individuals abuse alcohol or drugs, this is an individual problem, and for its relief we rightfully look to clinicians and counselors. When large segments of a population have alcohol or drug problems, this is a public issue and must be addressed at the level of social structure.

A sociological response to reducing alcohol and drug problems among Native Americans begins by asking what social structures encourage substance abuse. Conversely, why don't social structures reward those who avoid substance abuse?

The answer depends on one's theoretical framework. Structural functionalists would likely focus on the destruction of Native American institutions and the absence of harmony between their remaining institutions and those of white society. Conflict theorists would likely focus on how whites damaged or destroyed Native American societies by systematically and violently stripping them of their means of economic production.

Regardless of theoretical position, it is obvious that Native Americans are severely economically disadvantaged. Unemployment is often a way of life; on some reservations, up to 85 percent of the adults are unemployed. Lack of work is a critical factor in substance abuse in all populations. Having a steady, rewarding job is an incentive to avoid substance abuse; it also reduces the time available for drinking and drug use, which are essentially leisure-time activities. From this perspective, the solution to high levels of substance abuse among Native Americans must include changing economic institutions to provide full employment and bolstering Native American culture and pride, as well as hiring more doctors, counselors, and others to help individuals fight addiction.

In many ways, fighting substance abuse is like fighting measles. We cannot eradicate the problem by treating people after they have it; we have to *prevent* it in the first place. When substance abuse is epidemic in a community, it requires community-wide efforts for prevention. Statuses, roles, and institutions must be rebuilt so that people have a reason to avoid abusing drugs or alcohol. This is just as true when we are talking about isolated Native communities as when we are talking about college students, the subject of Focus on Media and Culture: Alcohol and Spring Break on the next page.

Social Interaction and Everyday Life

Why do people do what they do? The answer depends not only on their social roles but also on the situation and on their social status, resources, personalities, and previous experiences. Two people playing the role of physician will do so differently, and the same individual will play the role differently with different patients and in different circumstances. Social structure explains the broad outlines of why we do what we do, but it doesn't deal with specific concrete situations. This is where the sociology of

focus on

MEDIA AND CULTURE

Alcohol and Spring Break

Spring break comes in many flavors. Some students travel with their families, some work on service projects, some stay home to earn extra income or catch up on schoolwork, and some go to the beach to party with friends. Most of those partiers will return from their trips with nothing worse than bad sunburns. A few, though, will die when alcohol or drugs lead to car crashes, drownings, or falls from apartment balconies. And some will return with permanent disabilities, sexually transmitted diseases, or psychological traumas caused by sexual assault.

Students who travel together to "party beaches" for spring break typically drink more heavily, have more sexual partners, and use condoms less regularly than during the rest of the year (Grekin, Sher, & Krull 2007; Sönmez et al. 2006; Lee, Maggs, & Rankin 2006). What is it about spring break that sparks these sorts of activities?

When students go on spring break, they leave behind the social institutions—family, education, and work—that normally control their behaviors. They also leave behind the people who normally enforce institutional rules: professors, dorm counselors, bosses, parents. Once on spring break, students no longer need to meet the normal role expectations for them nor to protect their statuses as students, family members, or workers. There are no authorities around to supervise or judge their behaviors. And the students who *are*

around may come from other campuses or states, giving everyone an air of anonymity.

At the same time, the absence of normal roles, statuses, and institutions allows new norms to arise that encourage behaviors that would be unacceptable back home. For example, in one survey conducted for the American Medical Association, more than half of female college students reported that engaging in casual sex during spring break is a way to fit in (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2006).

Finally, these new norms are reinforced by corporations that profit from them. Video companies find easy profits in videos such as *Girls Gone Wild* that celebrate spring break as an "anything goes" party. These companies not only show the wildest side of spring break but also teach high school students to expect such activities when they go to college. Similarly, alcohol manufacturers and tour companies promote the wilder side of spring break to sell their products. For example, "Dos Equis girls" hand out free drinks while wearing string bikinis, and one tour company's website jokes, "Don't worry about the water [in Mexico] because

When students go to wild "party beaches" for spring break, they leave behind the social institutions that normally control their behaviors. As a result, many drink more heavily, have more sexual partners, and use condoms less regularly than they otherwise would.

you will be drinking beer" (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2006).

In sum, like New Orleans's Mardi Gras and Brazil's Carnaval, spring break offers students an opportunity to revel in freedom from everyday institutions, roles, and statuses.

everyday life comes in. Researchers who study the **sociology of everyday life** focus on the social processes that structure our experience in ordinary, face-to-face situations.

Managing Everyday Life

Much of our daily life consists of routines. For example, we all learn dozens of routines for carrying on daily conversations and can usually find an appropriate one for any occasion. Small rituals such as "Hello. How are you?" "Fine. How are you?" will carry

The **sociology of everyday life** focuses on the social processes that structure our experience in ordinary, face-to-face situations.

us through multiple encounters every day. If we supplement this ritual with half a dozen others, such as "Thanks/ You're welcome" and "Excuse me/No problem," we will be equipped to meet most of the repetitive situations of everyday life.

Nevertheless, each encounter is potentially problematic. What do you do when you say "How are you?" to someone purely as a social gesture, and they then regale you with their troubles for the next 20 minutes? What do you do when your father asks where his car keys are, and you know your brother took them without permission? Although, as Chapter 2 discussed, our culture provides a tool kit of routines, each of us must constantly decide which routine to employ, how, when, and why.

At the beginning of any encounter, then, individuals must resolve two issues: (1) What is going on here—what is the nature of the action? and (2) What identities will be granted—who are the actors? All action depends on

Because two people meeting in a business setting share the same *frame*, both know what to do and what it means when one extends a hand to the other.

our answers to these questions. Even the decision to ignore a stranger in the hallway presupposes that we have asked and answered these questions to our satisfaction. How do we do this?

Frames

The first step in any encounter is to develop an answer to the question, What is going on here? The answer forms a frame, or framework, for the encounter. A **frame** is roughly identical to a definition of the situation—a set of expectations about the nature of the interaction episode that is taking place.

All face-to-face encounters are preceded by a framework of expectations—how people will act, what they will mean by their actions, and so on. Even the simplest encounter—say, approaching a salesclerk to buy a pack of gum—involves dozens of expectations: In most parts of the United States we expect that the salesclerk will speak English, will wait first on the person who got to the counter first, will not try to barter with us over the price, and will not put us down if we are overweight. These expectations—the frame—give us guidance on how we should act and allow us to evaluate the encounter as normal or deviant.

Our frames will be shared with other actors in most of our routine encounters, but this is not always the case. We may simply be wrong in our assessment of what is going on, or other actors in the encounter may have an entirely different frame. The final frame that we use to define the situation will be the result of a negotiation between the actors.

Identity Negotiation

After we have put a frame on an encounter, we need to answer the second question: Which identities will be acknowledged? This question is far more complex than simply attaching names to the actors. Because each of us has a repertoire of roles and identities from which to choose, we are frequently uncertain about which identity an actor is presenting *in this specific situation.*

To some extent, identities will be determined by the frame being used. If a student's visit to a professor's office is framed as an academic tutorial, then the professor's academic identity is the relevant one. If the professor is a friend of the family, then their interaction might be framed as a social visit, and other aspects of the professor's identity (hobbies, family life, and so on) become relevant.

A **frame** is an answer to the question, what is going on here? It is roughly identical to a definition of the situation.

Typically, identities are not problematic in encounters. Although confusion about identities is a frequent device in comedy films, in real life, a few minutes chatting will usually resolve any confusion about actors' identities. In some cases, however, identity definitions are a matter of serious conflict. For example, Jennifer may want Mike to regard her as an equal, but Mike may prefer to treat her as an inferior.

Resolving the identity issue involves negotiations about both your own and the other's identity. How do we negotiate another's identity? We do so by trying to manipulate others into playing the roles we have assigned them. Mostly we handle this through talk. For example, "Let me introduce Mary, the computer whiz" sets up a different encounter than "Let me introduce Mary, the party animal." Of course, others may reject your casting decisions. Mary may prefer to present a different identity than you have suggested. In that case, she will try to renegotiate her identity.

Identity issues can become a major hidden agenda in interactions. Imagine a newly minted male lawyer talking to an established female lawyer. If the man finds this situation uncomfortable, he may try to define it as a man/woman encounter rather than a junior lawyer/senior lawyer encounter. He may start with techniques such as "How do you, as a woman, feel about this?" To reinforce this simple device, he might follow up with remarks such as "You're so small, you make me feel like a giant." He may interrupt her by remarking on her perfume. He may also use a variety of nonverbal strategies such as stretching his arm across the back of her chair to assert dominance. Through such strategies, actors try to negotiate both their own and others' identities.

Dramaturgy

The management of everyday life is the focus of a sociological perspective called *dramaturgy.* **Dramaturgy** is a version of symbolic interaction that views social situations as scenes manipulated by actors to convey their desired impression to the audience (Brissett & Edgley 2005).

The chief architect of the dramaturgical perspective is Erving Goffman (1959, 1963). To Goffman, all the world was a theater. Like actors, each of us uses our appearance to establish our character—something we do each morning as we choose which clothes to wear, how to style our hair, and whether this would be a good day to show off any tattoos or piercings that we have (e.g., Pitts-Taylor 2003). And like actors, we can use facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and other body language to enhance, reinforce, or even contradict the things we say. For example, telling a worried friend that "Your dress looks fine" doesn't mean as much if you say it without looking up from your cell phone.

Sociologists who use dramaturgy also point out that life, like the theater, has both a front region (the stage) where the performance occurs and a back region where rehearsals take place and different behavioral norms apply. For example, waiters at expensive restaurants are acutely aware of being on stage and act in a dignified and formal manner (Fine 1996). Once in the kitchen, however, they may be transformed back into rowdy college kids.

The ultimate back region for most of us, the place where we can be our real selves, is at home. Nevertheless, even here front-region behavior is called for when company comes. ("Oh yes, we always keep our house this clean.") On such occasions, a married couple functions as a team in a performance designed to manage their guests' impressions. People who were screaming at each other before the doorbell rang suddenly start calling each other "dear" and "honey." The guests are the audience, and they too play a role. By seeming to believe the team's act, they contribute to a successful visit/performance.

Dramaturgy is a version of symbolic interaction that views social situations as scenes manipulated by the actors to convey the desired impression to the audience.

Impression Management

So far, we've mostly focused on *what* people do in everyday encounters. But it's also important to ask *why* people do what they do. The answer most often supplied by scholars studying everyday behavior is that people are trying to enhance their social position and self-esteem (Owens, Stryker, & Goodman 2001; Guadagno & Cialdini 2007). These are some of the most important rewards that human interaction has to offer, and we try to manage the impression we make on others to improve our chances of getting these rewards.

The work that we do to control others' views of us is known as **impression management** (Goffman 1959). Most of the time, we use impression management to gain social approval from others. We wear fashionable clothes and hairstyles and try to behave in courteous and friendly ways. However, impression management can also be used to appear *less* socially acceptable: Punks, goths, "emos," or gang members, for example, may choose hairstyles and clothing in part because they *want* others to fear them or be repelled by them (Wilkins 2008; Pitts-Taylor 2003).

We also engage in impression management when we *explain* our behaviors and choices. Two common strategies are avoiding blame and gaining credit (Tedeschi & Riess 1981; Guadagno & Cialdini 2007).

© Jose Luis Pelaez, Inc./Surf/Corbis

This boy's body language radiates his dissatisfaction.

Avoiding Blame

There are many potential sources of damage to our social identity and self-esteem. We may have lost our job, flunked a class, been unintentionally rude, or said something that we immediately feared made us look stupid. When we behave in ways that make us look bad, or when we fear we are on the verge of doing so, we need to find ways to protect our social position and self-esteem.

Most of this work is done through talk. C. Wright Mills (1940, 909) noted that we learn how to justify our norm violations more or less at the same time that we learn the norms themselves. If we can successfully explain away our rule-breaking, we can present ourselves as people who normally obey norms and who deserve to be thought well of by ourselves and others. The two basic strategies we use to avoid blame are *accounts* and *disclaimers*.

Accounts

Much of the rule-breaking that occurs in everyday life is of a minor sort that can be explained away. We do this by giving **accounts**, explanations of unexpected or untoward behavior. Accounts fall into two categories: *excuses* and *justifications* (Scott & Lyman 1968). **Excuses** are accounts in which an individual admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but claims he or she couldn't help it. **Justifications** are accounts that explain the good reasons the violator had for breaking the rule; often these take the form of appeals to some higher rule (Scott & Lyman, 47).

Students are often quite adept at excuses and justifications. When the website **www.rateyourstudents.com** asked professors to report their favorites, one told of a student who apologized for turning in a paper late (Troop 2007). The student's *excuse* was that he was the school mascot and had left his paper stuck in the arm of the mascot costume, which had been locked in the sports department office over the weekend.

Impression management consists of actions and statements made to control how others view us.

Accounts are explanations of unexpected or untoward behavior. They are of two sorts: excuses and justifications.

Excuses are accounts in which one admits that the act in question is wrong or inappropriate but claims one couldn't help it.

Justifications are accounts that explain the good reasons the violator had for choosing to break the rule; often they are appeals to some alternate rule.

focus on   AMERICAN DIVERSITY

Becoming Goth

It's never easy being a young person. No longer kids but not yet fully independent adults, young people in their teens and twenties struggle both to create their own identities and to convince others to believe in those identities. But why would someone choose an identity that seems guaranteed to lead to social rejection? To answer this question, sociologist Amy C. Wilkins (2008) spent months observing and interviewing young people who identified themselves as Goths.

Goths favor black clothes, often torn and safety-pinned; tattoos that lean more to skulls than to butterflies; dark makeup for both males and females; and black or wildly colored hair in styles that defy peer norms. Stickers, T-shirts, and other items proudly highlight Goth's enjoyment of loud and angry bands and of anything related to death, including vampires, cemeteries, or horror films.

As this description suggests, it takes work to create a Goth impression. So why would anyone wish to do so?

The Goths interviewed by Wilkins claimed that they had always been Goth in their hearts, and had simply found a community that shared their views. Wilkins, however, reached a different conclusion. The Goths, she noticed, were all white and middle-class, with no interest in athletics but considerable interest in math, computers, science, and science fiction. In other words, they were "geeks." Before they became Goths, others would pick them last for teams at recess, ridicule them in hallways, or consider them fun targets for violence. They didn't have the social status of white boys who excelled at sports or of white girls who dressed well and had fashionable hairstyles. Nor did they have the social status of African American or Hispanic kids, who are assumed to be cool by high school students who value hip-hop culture.

By adopting Goth appearances and managing others' impressions of them, Goths achieved several goals. First, they scared other people—intentionally—and thus were less likely to become targets for violence. Second, they gained respect from their peers, who recognized Goths as rebels. Third, they gained new *accounts* that justified their behaviors, interests, and appearances and allowed them to discount the views of anyone who didn't share their views. Similarly, other white, middle-class kids who don't neatly fit cultural norms—boys interested in art, poetry, or bisexuality and smart girls not inclined toward smiling—also may adopt punk or emo identities and appearances. By so doing, they can turn themselves from outcasts into "outlaws."

Ladi Kirn/Alamy

Adopting a Goth appearance can help marginalize young people to justify their actions and beliefs, to discount anyone who doesn't share their views, to gain respect from peers who now view them as rebels, and thus to transform themselves from outcasts into "outlaws."

Another professor submitted the following student *justification*:

I will be unable to be in class today because every year we have a Jell-O wrestling competition on campus, and it has just come to my attention that the 50 gallons of Jell-O that we previously made has spoiled. So now I have to remake the 50 gallons before 9 o'clock tonight.... I understand this is a really weird circumstance, but without the Jell-O

we have no competition, and without the competition we lose all of our fund-raising. Thank you, and have a good weekend. (Troop 2007)

Accounts such as these are verbal efforts to resolve the discrepancy between what happened and what others legitimately expected to happen. When others accept our accounts, our self-identity and social status are preserved and our interactions with others can proceed normally.

Disclaimers

A person who recognizes that he or she is likely to violate expectations may preface that action with a **disclaimer**, a verbal device used in advance to defeat any doubts and negative reaction that might result from conduct (Hewitt & Stokes 1975, 3). Students often begin a query with "I know this is a stupid question, but … ." The disclaimer lets the hearer know that the speaker knows the rules, even though he or she doesn't know the answer.

Disclaimers occur before the act; accounts occur after the act. Nevertheless, both are verbal devices we use to try to maintain a good image of ourselves, both in our own eyes and in the eyes of others. They help us to avoid self-blame for rule-breaking and to reduce the chances that others might blame us for our actions. If we succeed in this impression management, we can retain a fairly good reputation and social status, despite occasional failures in meeting our social responsibilities.

The Concept Summary on Using Disclaimers and Accounts reviews the differences between these two verbal strategies.

concept summary

Using Disclaimers and Accounts

As part of the battle against terrorism, the U.S. government authorized the use of various tactics that other countries outlaw as torture, such as waterboarding: pouring water over a prisoner's face to force water inhalation, thereby causing the prisoner to experience great pain, the sensation of drowning, and sometimes brain, lung, or bone damage. The strategies used by U.S. government and military officials to avoid blame for waterboarding illustrate the ways people use disclaimers and accounts.

Strategy	Definition	Example
Disclaimers	Verbal strategies used *in advance* to ward off the possibility that others may think one is doing something wrong	We would never use torture, although of course we will need to use waterboarding and other forms of "harsh" or "enhanced" interrogation.
Accounts	Explanations offered *after the fact* to try to avoid blame for behaviors generally considered unacceptable	(See examples of excuses and justifications, both of which are types of accounts.)
Excuses	Acknowledging that a behavior is wrong, but stating that it was out of your control	We (the military) had to use waterboarding because top government officials ordered us to do so.
Justifications	Arguing that although a behavior might have seemed wrong, it was justified because of a higher moral good	We had to use waterboarding to stop the terrorists and save American lives.

A **disclaimer** is a verbal device employed in advance to ward off doubts and negative reactions that might result from one's conduct.
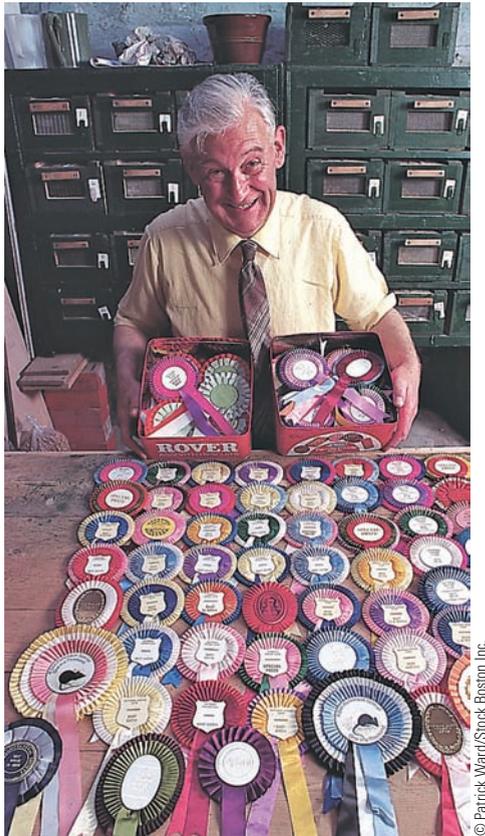
Like this mouse breeder showing off his awards, most of us seek ways to enhance our credit with others.

Gaining Credit

To maintain our self-esteem, we need not only to avoid blame but also to get credit for anything good we do. With this goal in mind, we employ a variety of verbal devices to associate ourselves with positive outcomes (Guadagno & Cialdini 2007). Just as there are a variety of ways to avoid blame, there are many ways we can claim credit. One way is to link ourselves to situations or individuals with high status. This ranges from dropping the names of popular students we happen to know, to wearing a baseball cap from a winning team, to making a $1,000 donation at a political fund-raiser so we can get a signed photograph of the President to hang on our wall.

Claiming credit is a strategy that requires considerable tact. Bragging is generally considered inappropriate, and if you pat yourself too hard on the back, you are likely to find that others will refuse to do so. The trick is to find the delicate balance where others are subtly reminded of your admirable qualities without your actually having to ask for or demand praise. If you do very well on an exam, for example, you might let others know how well you did while simultaneously suggesting that your high score was just a matter of luck.

Case Study: Impression Management and Homeless Kids

One of the best ways to understand impression management is to look at individuals who have what Goffman (1961b) called *spoiled identities*—identities that are extremely low in status. Examples include sex offenders, traitors, and people with disfiguring facial scars. How do people with spoiled identities sustain their self-esteem and manage the way others views them?

A study among homeless kids in transitional settings (such as shelters and motels) in San Francisco investigated just this question. Anne Roschelle spent four years volunteering at drop-in centers for homeless kids, observing their activities and conversations, and talking with them formally and informally (Roschelle & Kaufman 2004).

The kids Roschelle met were keenly aware of their spoiled identities. They knew that local newspapers often ran stories on the "homeless problem," and that local politicians gained votes by vowing to remove the homeless from the city. As one kid explained, "Everyone hates the homeless because we represent what sucks in society. If this country was really so great there wouldn't be kids like us" (Roschelle & Kaufman 2004, 30). How, then, did these kids maintain their self-esteem and try to control others' images of them?

Roschelle and her co-author, Peter Kaufman, found that the kids used two sets of strategies: fitting in and fighting back. *Fitting in* could take various forms. Kids struck up friendships with volunteers and with other homeless kids so they would feel they were valued as individuals. They also tried to fit in by dressing, talking, and acting as much like nonhomeless kids as they could: selecting the most stylish coats from the donations box rather than the warmest ones, for example. Kids also chose their words carefully to hide their homelessness. At school, they called caseworkers their "aunts," called homeless shelter staff their "friends," and referred to friends who slept three cots away as friends who lived three houses away.

Like everyone else, homeless youths try to manage others' impressions of them. This young man may well have found that owning a cute puppy encourages others to view him as less threatening and as more deserving of aid.

Janine Wiedel Photolibrary/Alamy

Homeless kids also protected their identities by *fighting back.* First, they used "gangsta" clothes, gestures, and actions to intimidate nonhomeless kids. Second, they adopted sexual behaviors and attitudes far beyond their years and took pride in their sexual "conquests." Finally, they bolstered their social position by loudly criticizing homeless street people who were more stigmatized than themselves:

> Rosita: Man, look at those smelly street people, they are so disgusting, why don't they take a shower?
>
> Jalesa: Yeah, I'm glad they don't let them into Hamilton [shelter] with us.
>
> Rosita: Really, they would steal our stuff and stink up the place!
>
> Jalesa: Probably be drunk all the time too. (Roschelle & Kaufman 2004, 37)

By contrasting themselves with more stigmatized others, Rosita, Jalesa, and other kids could feel better about themselves.

The homeless kids that Roschelle and Kaufman studied possessed many traits that typically lead to poor self-esteem and social disapproval: They were hungry, poor, ragged, and homeless in a society that values wealth and blames poverty on the poor. Yet many nevertheless managed to feel good about themselves and to control, at least in part, how others viewed them. Their experiences confirm the assumption made by the interaction school: Even in the face of a spoiled identity, we can use impression management to negotiate a positive self-concept and a more satisfying social position. But their experiences also illustrate that tactics used to do so can be harmful: Thirteen-year-olds who take pride in "seducing" 33-year-olds or in threatening others with knives and guns are likely to suffer in the long run.

Where This Leaves Us

In the 1950s, structural-functional theory dominated sociology, and a great deal of emphasis was placed on the power of institutionalized norms to determine behavior. Beginning in the 1960s, however, sociologists grew increasingly concerned that this

view of human behavior reflected an "oversocialized view of man" (Wrong 1961). In 1967, Garfinkel signaled rebellion against this perspective when he argued that the deterministic model presented people as "judgmental dopes" who couldn't do their own thinking.

Since then, scholars have increasingly tended to view social behavior as more negotiable and less rule bound and have increasingly focused on how people resist rather than accommodate to social pressures (Weitz 2001). This change is obvious not only in the sociology of everyday life, but also in most other areas of sociology, including studies of hospitals, businesses, schools, and other large organizations (e.g., Jurik, Cavender, & Cowgill 2009; Bettie 2003). This does not mean that rules don't make a difference. Indeed, they make a great deal of difference, and there are obvious limits to the extent to which we can negotiate given situations. Each actor's ability to negotiate depends on his or her access to resources and power, both of which are strongly determined by social structure.

The perspective of life as problematic and negotiable is a useful balance to the role of social structure in determining behavior. Our behavior is neither entirely negotiable nor entirely determined.

Summary

1. The analysis of social structure—recurrent patterns of relationships—revolves around three concepts: status, role, and institution. Statuses are specialized positions within a group and may be of two types: achieved or ascribed. Roles define how status occupants ought to act and feel.
2. Because societies share common human needs, they also share common institutions: enduring and complex social structures that meet basic human needs. Some of those common institutions are family, economy, government, education, and religion.
3. Institutions are interdependent; none stands alone, and so a change in one results in changes in others. Structural functionalists point out that institutions regulate behavior and maintain the stability of social life across generations. Conflict theorists note that these patterns often benefit one group more than others.
4. An important determinant of institutional development is the ability of a society to produce an economic surplus.

Each major improvement in production has led to an expansion in social institutions.
5. The sociology of everyday life analyzes the patterns of human social behavior in concrete encounters in daily life.
6. Deciding how to act in a given encounter requires answering two questions: What is going on here? and Which identities will be acknowledged? These issues of framing and identity negotiation may involve competition and negotiation between actors or teams of actors.
7. Dramaturgy is a symbolic interactionist perspective pioneered by Erving Goffman. It views the self as a strategist who is choosing roles and setting scenes to maximize self-interest.
8. The desire for approval is an important factor guiding human behavior. To maximize this approval, people engage in active impression management to sustain and support their self-esteem. This work takes two forms: avoiding blame and gaining credit.

Thinking Critically

1. Is social class an achieved or ascribed status? What would a structural functionalist say? A conflict theorist? A symbolic interactionist?

2. Consider religion as an institution. How would a conflict theorist view it? What might a structural functionalist say? Which position is closest to your own view and why?

3. Pick a social problem that affects you personally; for example, alcoholism, unemployment, racism, sexism, illegal immigration. Describe a social structural solution—one that focuses on changing the underlying social structural causes of the problem rather than on improving individuals' situations one by one.

4. Describe a time when you disagreed with someone about his or her identity. What kind of situation was it, and why was the identity problematic? In the end, whose definition of identity was accepted? Why?

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