

The Sociological Perspective Part II

Using the sociological perspective changes how we perceive the surrounding world and ourselves.

Peter Berger



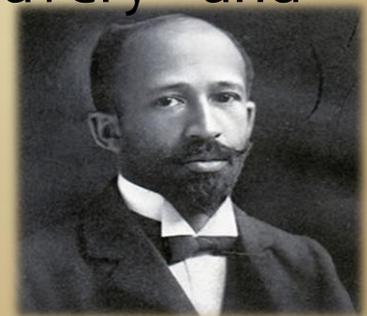


The Historical Development of Sociology

- sociology in North America
 - early history: tension between social reform and sociological analysis
 - WEB Du Bois and race relations
 - Jane Addams and social reform
 - Talcott Parsons and C. Wright Mills: theory vs. reform
 - continuing tension and the rise of applied sociology

The Historical Development of Sociology

- **WEB Du Bois** (1868-1963)
 - first African-American PhD graduate of Harvard University
 - concerned with the social position of African-Americans in US society
 - wrote *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) on race relations
 - used statistics to examine racial discrimination
 - contributed the idea of the **double consciousness**: psychological challenge of reconsidering an African heritage with a European upbringing in slavery and education
 - focused on the *strange meaning of being black*



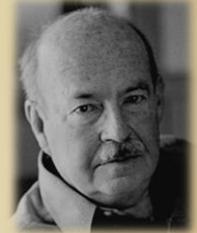
The Historical Development of Sociology

- **Jane Addams** (1880-1935)
 - won the first Nobel Peace Prize (1931) given to an American sociologist
 - founded Hull House for the poor in Chicago
 - influenced the Chicago School of applied sociology (social problems)
 - pioneered the study of social problems



The Historical Development of Sociology

- **Talcott Parsons** (1902-1979)
 - reintroduced the theories of European sociologists while teaching at Harvard University
 - abstract ivory-tower theoretician
 - emphasis on empirical research, not social reform
- **C Wright Mills** (1916-1962)
 - Marxist theorist, taught at Columbia University
 - the sociological imagination
 - focus on power elite, radical social change, social injustices, applied sociology



Sociology and the Other Sciences

- **the natural sciences:** explain and predict events in the natural environment
- **the social sciences:** examine human relationships
 - Anthropology: studies culture
 - Economics: studies the production and distribution of goods and services
 - Political Science: studies how people govern themselves
 - Psychology: the study of processes within individuals
 - Sociology has similarities to the other disciplines.





Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

- There are many theories in sociology, but there are broad theoretical perspectives that are prominent in the field.
- These perspectives are prominent because they are good at explaining social life. They are not without their problems, but they remain widely used and cited precisely because they have withstood a great deal of criticism.
- One is not better than another. It is probably more useful to view theoretical perspectives as complementary. One may explain one element of society better than another. Or, two may be useful for explaining society.
- All of the theoretical perspectives are correct in the sense that they offer compelling explanations for social phenomena.

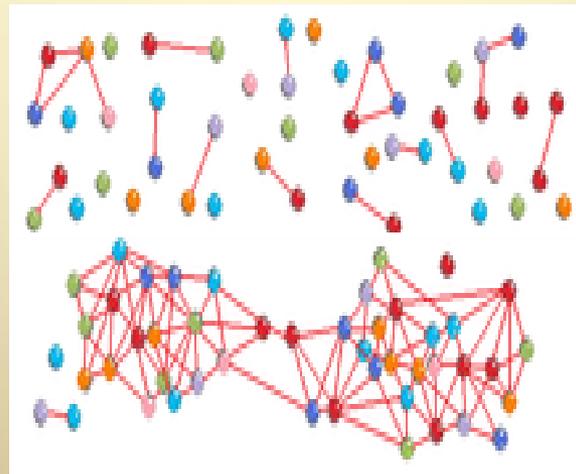


Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

theoretical perspective	symbolic interactionism	structural functionalism	conflict theory
level of analysis	micro	macro	macro
focus of analysis	face-to-face interaction, how people use symbols to create social life	relationships among parts of society, how they are functional (have positive consequences) or dysfunctional (have negative consequences)	the struggle for scarce resources by groups in society, how elites use power to control weaker groups
key terms	symbols, interaction, meanings, definitions	structure, functions (manifest, latent), dysfunctions, equilibrium	inequality, power, conflict, competition, exploitation
example: US divorce rate	industrialization and urbanization changed marital roles, redefinition of love, marriage, children and divorce	social change erodes traditional functions of family, family ties weaken, divorce rate increases	women find few alternatives in male-controlled economy, high divorce rate reflects shift in balance of power

Levels of Analysis

- The term level of analysis is used in the social sciences to point to the location, size or scale of a research target.
- Level of analysis is distinct from the term *unit of observation* in that the former refers to a more or less integrated set of relationships while the latter refers to the distinct unit from which data have been or will be gathered.





Levels of Analysis

- **micro level:** examines small-scale patterns of social interaction
 - homelessness: analyze the culture and communication of homeless people (How do they survive? How do they interact with one another in the shelters and streets?)
- **macro level:** examines large-scale patterns in society
 - homelessness: examine how changes in parts of society (economy, family) have increased homelessness or struggle between social classes

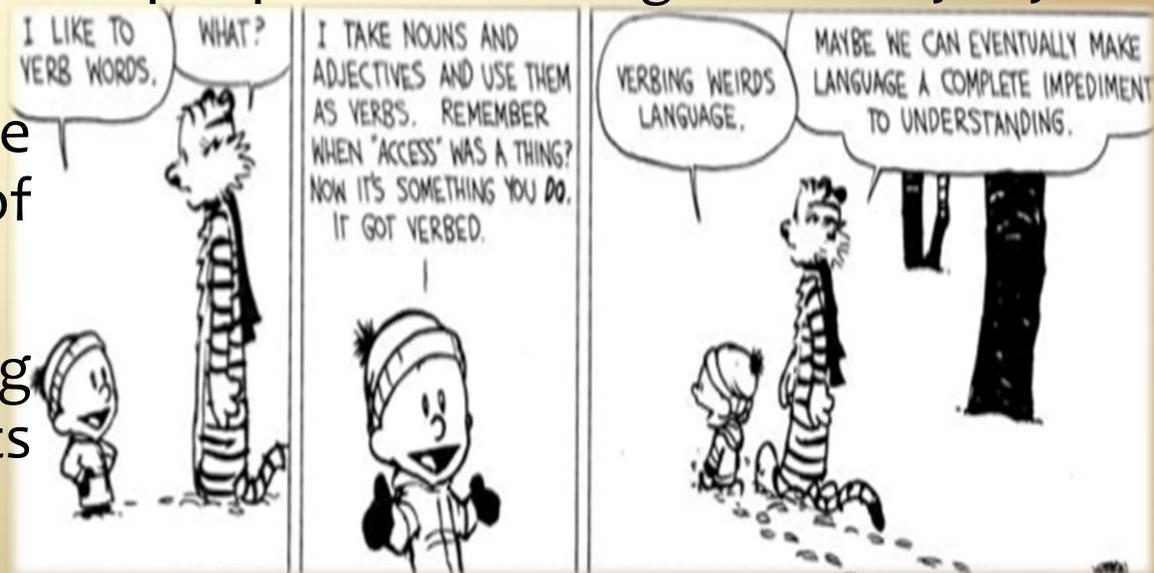
Theoretical Perspectives: Symbolic Interactionism

- ...how people use symbols in everyday life
- studies society through interactions within individual and small groups
- asks questions such as...
 - How do individuals experience one another?
 - How do they interpret the meaning of these interactions?
 - How do people construct a sense of self and of the society as a whole?



Theoretical Perspectives: Symbolic Interactionism

- Humans are social animals and require interaction.
- Humans use symbols to develop views about the world and communicate with one another.
- Interaction between individuals is negotiated through shared symbols, gestures and nonverbal communications.
- Society is a product of people interacting in everyday situations.
- Society operates on the subjective meanings of symbols.
- Changing the meaning of symbols affects expectations.



Theoretical Perspectives: Symbolic Interactionism

- examples
 - the meaning of children and parenthood
 - marital roles
 - the meaning of divorce
 - stubborn / steadfast
 - police lights
 - bar fight
 - clothes
 - cloning / somatic nuclear cell transfer
 - network analysis and the capture of Saddam Hussein

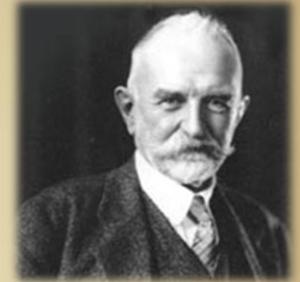


Theoretical Perspectives: Symbolic Interactionism



- **George Herbert Mead** (1863-1961)

- The self is a social product acquired by observing and assimilating the identities of others.

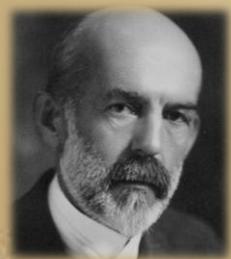


- significant other, generalized other, role taking, preparatory stage, play stage, game stage

- **Charles Horton Cooley** (1864-1929)

- We develop a sense of who we are in society based upon interaction with others and how we feel others perceive us.

- the **looking glass self**: the tendency for humans to understand themselves through their own understanding of the perception which others may hold of them

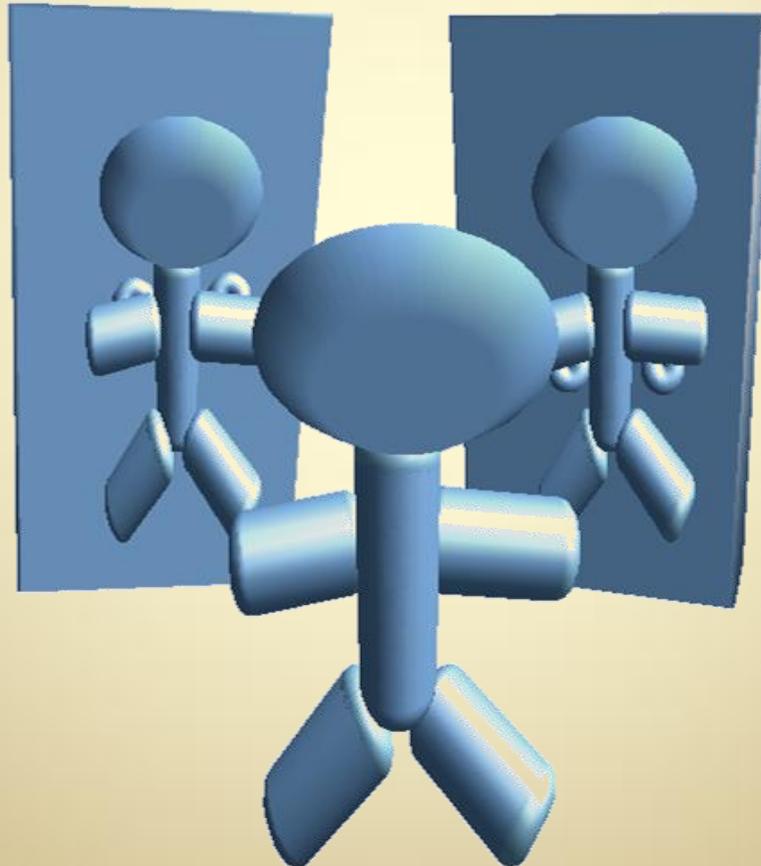


The Looking Glass Self

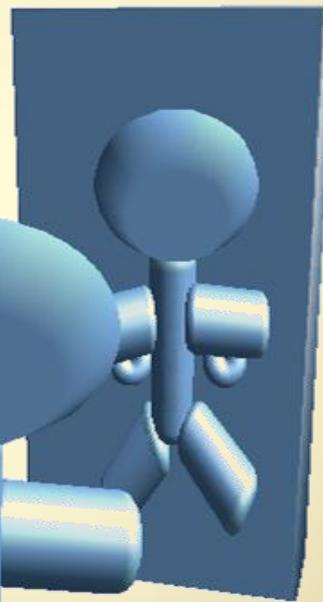
How my mom and dad see me.



How my girlfriend sees me.



How my older brother sees me.



How my ex-girlfriend sees me.



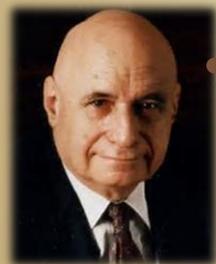
Theoretical Perspectives: Symbolic Interactionism

- Erving Goffman (1922-1982)
 - We play roles and present a face for public view.
 - **dramaturgical analysis**: the idea that people's day-to-day lives can be understood as resembling performers in action on a theater stage ... a series of performances
 - **presentation of self**: efforts to create specific impressions in the minds of others based on who our audience is, the way we dress (our costume), the objects we carry or use (our props), our tone of voice and gestures, etc
 - frontstage and backstage selves



Theoretical Perspectives: Symbolic Interactionism

- Peter L Berger (1929-2017)
 - the **social construction of reality**: Humans construct a shared social reality, from ordinary language to large-scale institutions. (with Thomas Luckmann)
 - Social interactions in everyday life favor personal, face-to-face encounters as the best scenarios where human beings can actually connect with each other through interactions.
 - People understand knowledge through language so language is imperative to the understanding of everyday life.
 - Language helps create shared symbols and stocks of knowledge and participation in these things inherently makes us participate in society.



The Social Construction of Reality

	<p style="text-align: center;">Social World</p>	
<p>1. Externalization People create their social world by ordering the mass of sense impressions and experiences into a meaningful whole.</p>	<p>2. Objectification The social world is objectified and reified through language and discourse and institutions.</p>	<p>3. Internalization The objectified world acts back on the human consciousness through the process of socialization.</p>

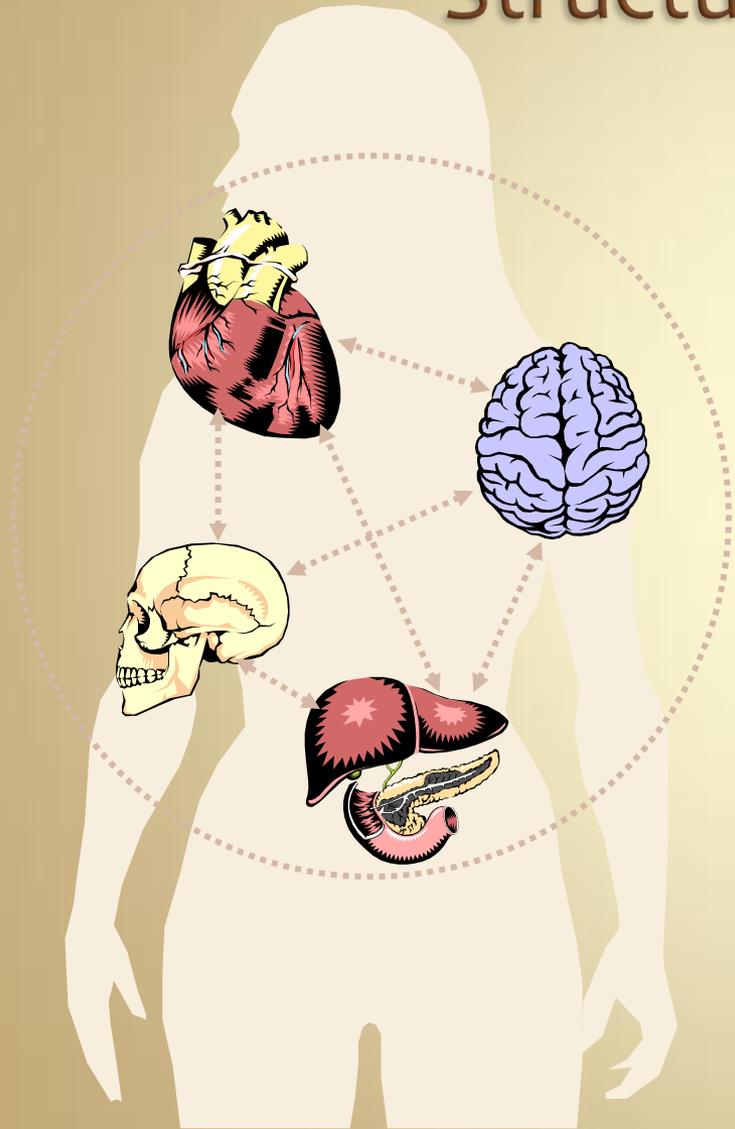




Theoretical Perspectives: Structural Functionalism

- ...sees society as a whole unit made up of interrelated and interdependent parts that work together, a complex system promoting solidarity and stability
- Major changes to the system's parts are not required or desired ... system seeks to maintain its equilibrium.
- Change is generally viewed as disruptive and gradual.
- **social structure**: refers to relatively stable patterns of social behavior found in social institutions

Theoretical Perspectives: Structural Functionalism



- Society is viewed as very similar to the human body.
- Each part meets a need in order to maintain a normal state of balance.
- Social systems are viewed as similar to organs.

Theoretical Perspectives: Structural Functionalism

- interdependent network of social institutions (family, school, business, religion, etc) that shape our lives
- Social system contributes to the stability of society.
 - equilibrium or stability
 - disequilibrium or instability
- examples: family, premarital sex, prohibition



Theoretical Perspectives: Structural Functionalism

- **social function:** refers to the consequences of social patterns for society
 - **manifest functions:** recognized or intended consequences
 - **latent functions:** unrecognized and unintended consequences, social dysfunction
- Society is based on shared values, norms, attitudes and beliefs (**consensus**).
- theorists: Herbert Spencer, Émile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons

Theoretical Perspectives: Structural Functionalism

- **Robert K. Merton** (1910-2002)
 - taught at Columbia University
 - sought to bridge the European grand theories and a more focused research style
 - manifest and latent functions, dysfunctions
 - **strain theory of deviance**: When people are prevented from achieving culturally approved goals through institutional means, they experience strain or frustration that can lead to deviance.



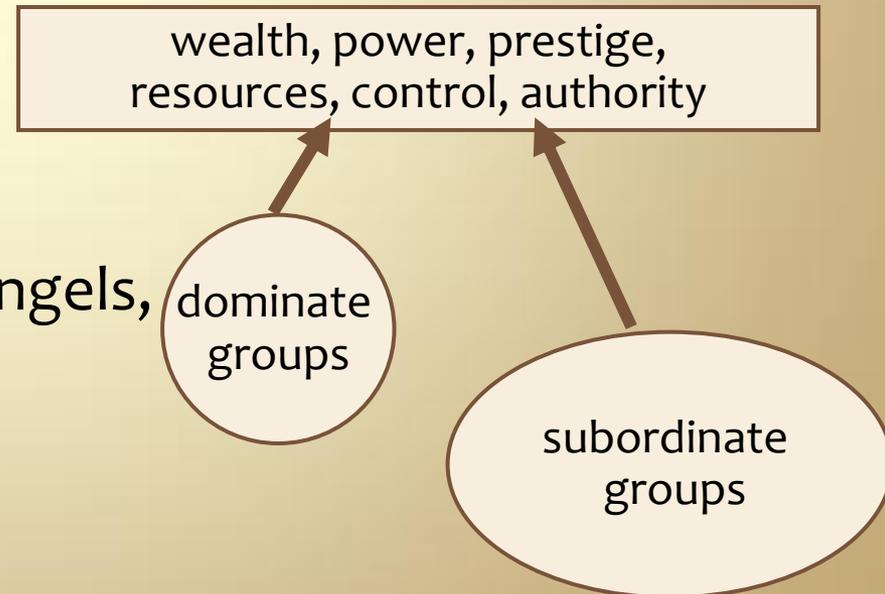


Theoretical Perspectives: Social Conflict Theory

- ...views society as a struggle for resources and power, a structured system based on inequality
- Society is structured in ways to benefit a few at the expense of the majority.
- Factors such as race, sex, class and age are linked to social inequality.
 - dominant group vs. minority group relations
 - incompatible interests, major differences
- Social consensus is limited and inequality is widespread.

Theoretical Perspectives: Social Conflict Theory

- Inequality leads to conflict.
- Conflict is universal.
- Conflict between the classes determines social change.
- Change is inevitable, often beneficial and can be violent.
- Some groups prosper at the expense of others.
 - workers vs. owners
 - civil rights movements
- theorists: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, C Wright Mills



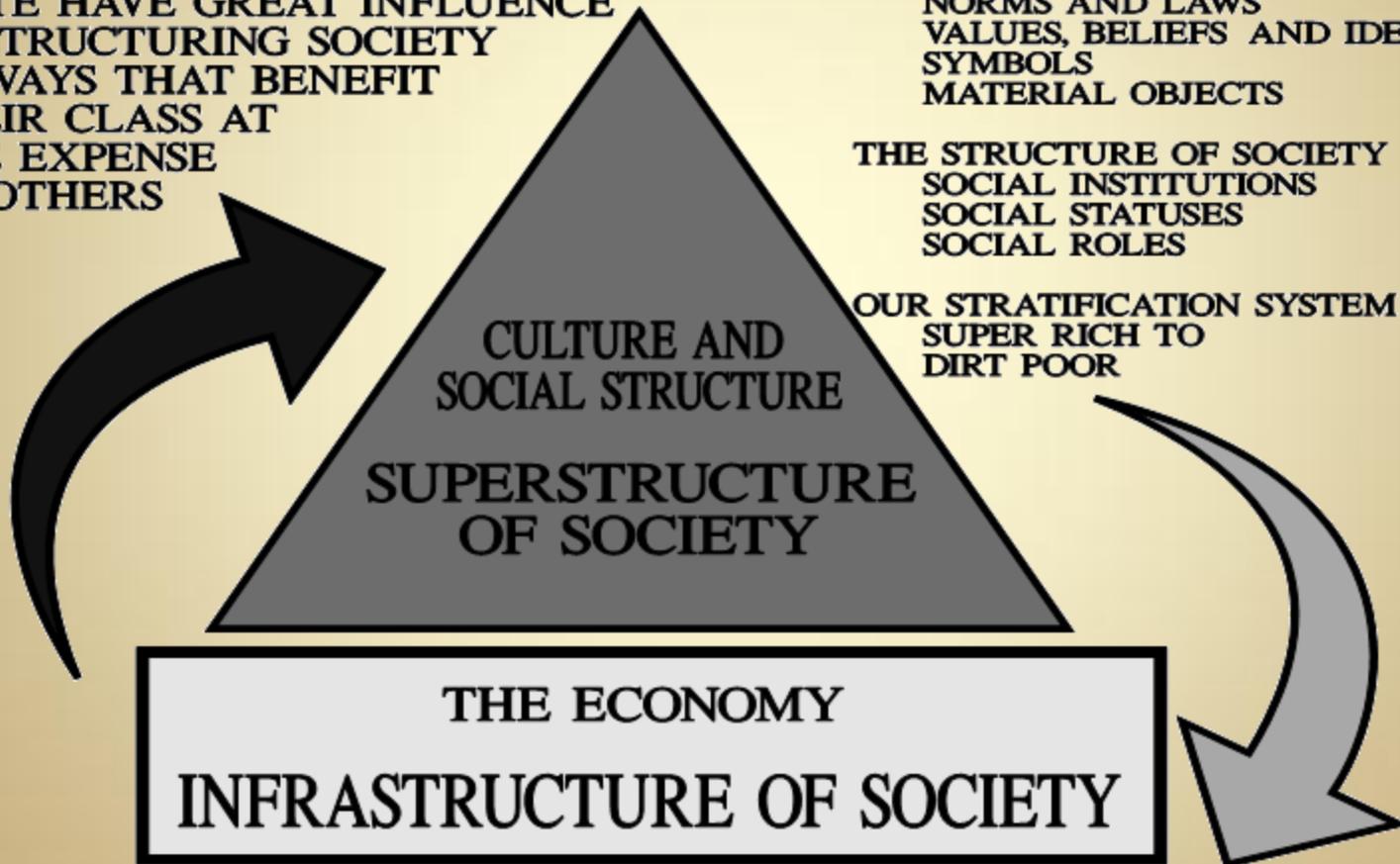
Theoretical Perspectives: Social Conflict Theory

MEMBERS OF THE RULING
 ELITE HAVE GREAT INFLUENCE
 IN STRUCTURING SOCIETY
 IN WAYS THAT BENEFIT
 THEIR CLASS AT
 THE EXPENSE
 OF OTHERS

ELEMENTS OF CULTURE
 LANGUAGE
 NORMS AND LAWS
 VALUES, BELIEFS AND IDEOLOGIES
 SYMBOLS
 MATERIAL OBJECTS

THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY
 SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS
 SOCIAL STATUSES
 SOCIAL ROLES

OUR STRATIFICATION SYSTEM
 SUPER RICH TO
 DIRT POOR



THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION DIVIDE AMERICA
 INTO TWO DISTINCT GROUPS:

THE CAPITALISTS AND THE WORKERS
 LOCKED IN ETERNAL CONFLICT

Critical Evaluation of Paradigms

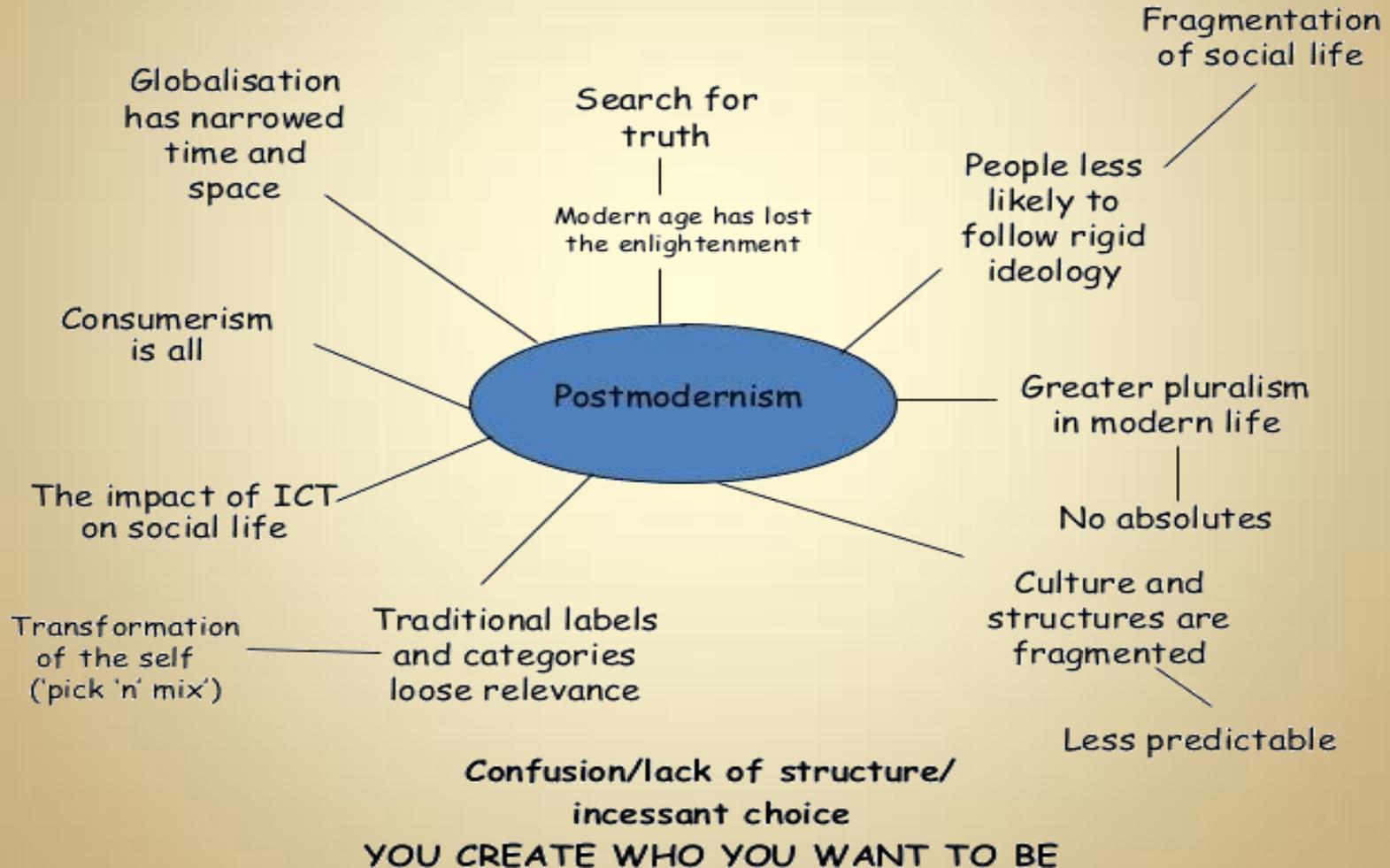
- symbolic interactionism
 - ignores larger social structures, effects of culture and factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, race
- structural functionalism
 - assumes natural order ... ignores inequalities of social class, race and gender ... focuses on stability at the expense of conflict
- social conflict theory
 - ignores how shared values and mutual interdependence unify society
 - If it pursues political goals, it cannot be scientific.

Recent Paradigms

- **feminist paradigm:** the study of women's lives
 - micro: reproduction of gender through language and emotion management
 - macro: constraints and forms of resistance in women's lives
- **postmodernist paradigm:** anti-theory and anti-methods
 - deconstructs and demystifies assumptions, hierarchies of knowledge and ideological motivation



Postmodernist Paradigm



Trends Shaping the Future of Sociology

- sociology full circle: **reform vs. research** ... three stages
 - until 1920s: improve society
 - 1920s-WWII: develop abstract knowledge
 - WWII-present: seek ways to apply research findings
 - never been complete consensus on which approach is better

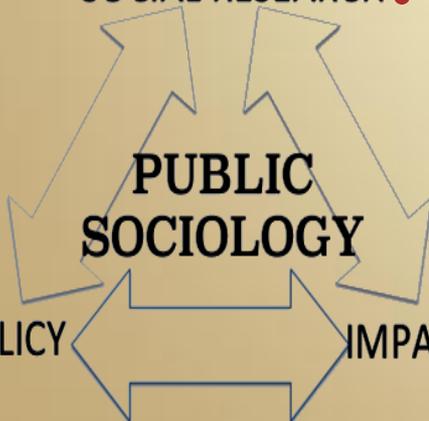
SOCIAL RESEARCH

- **public sociology**: promoted by American Sociological Association in attempt to get the public, especially politicians and policy makers, to make use of sociological data in order to better understand how society works

**PUBLIC
SOCIOLOGY**

POLICY

IMPACT





Trends Shaping the Future of Sociology

- **diversification of orientations:** development of new specialisms and sub-disciplines may lead to fragmentation but can also be seen as growth and diversification
- changing student population and an entrepreneurial trend within higher education increasingly forcing redevelopment as a service industry
- **globalization:** breakdown of national boundaries due to advances in communications, travel, trade ... one of most significant events in world history ... likely to broaden the scope of sociological inquiry beyond its traditional concentration on US society

The End

