SR 968-22 Sociological Methodology: Interpreting Changing Cultures

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**Source One:** Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. University of California Press.

**Comment 1:** Herbert Blumer's 1969 work, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, is a foundational text in the study of human interactions and the meanings individuals ascribe to their social experiences.

**Quote/Paraphrase:** Blumer argues that people act based on the meanings objects, events, and relationships hold for them, and that these meanings emerge through social interaction and interpretation. For example, he states that “symbolic interactionism is the process of interpretation through which individuals define and redefine the meanings of their social world.” (paraphrased)

**Essential Element:** The core principle of symbolic interactionism is that social reality is not fixed but rather constructed and reconstructed through human interaction. Meaning is not intrinsic to objects but arises from the shared interpretation between individuals.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** Blumer builds on the work of earlier theorists like George Herbert Mead but diverges by emphasizing the dynamic nature of meaning-making. Unlike rigid structuralist approaches, symbolic interactionism allows for personal agency, meaning that individuals continuously negotiate and alter their perceptions based on new interactions.

**Contextualization:** Blumer's perspective is particularly relevant in fields like sociology, psychology, and communication studies, influencing research on identity, group dynamics, and social change. His insights continue to shape modern discussions on social behavior, including in areas such as media studies and digital communication, where meaning is constructed and reshaped in virtual interactions.

**Source Two:** Corrigan, P. W., & Nieweglowski, K. (2019). How does familiarity impact stigma? *Clinical Psychology Science and Practice, 26*(3), e12240. https://doi.org/10.1111/cpsp.12240

**Comment 2:** Corrigan and Nieweglowski’s 2019 study, *How does familiarity impact stigma?*, examines how personal experience and exposure to mental illness influence stigma attitudes.

**Quote/Paraphrase:** The authors suggest that greater familiarity with mental illness—whether through personal experience, close relationships, or education—reduces stigma. They argue that “contact is one of the most effective means of diminishing negative stereotypes about people with mental health conditions” (paraphrased).

**Essential Element:** The central claim of the study is that direct and indirect familiarity with mental health conditions challenges misconceptions and fosters empathy. This insight builds on the broader premise that stigma is socially constructed and reinforced by lack of understanding.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** Corrigan and Nieweglowski contribute to existing stigma research by emphasizing the variability of contact. While past research has focused on public campaigns to improve mental health awareness, their work distinguishes between different forms of familiarity—such as lived experience versus distant exposure—highlighting their varying effects on stigma reduction.

**Contextualization:** This study has significant implications for mental health advocacy, workplace policies, and public health interventions. It supports the push for personal storytelling and direct engagement as powerful tools in reducing stigma, reinforcing the idea that structured interactions with individuals who have lived experience can reshape societal attitudes. Their findings align with broader trends in social psychology regarding the role of contact in prejudice reduction across different marginalized groups.

**Source Three:** Heddendorf, R. (2010). *Hidden threads: A Christian critique of sociological theory*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

**Comment 3:** Heddendorf’s *Hidden Threads: A Christian Critique of Sociological Theory* (2010) examines the intersection of faith and sociological thought, offering a perspective that challenges secular assumptions in social theory.

**Quote/Paraphrase:** Heddendorf argues that modern sociological theories often overlook or minimize the role of religious belief in shaping human behavior and social structures. He suggests that “Christian perspectives provide an essential counterbalance to the dominance of secular frameworks in sociological analysis” (paraphrased).

**Essential Element:** The central premise of the book is that Christian thought offers an alternative lens through which to understand social interactions and institutions. Rather than viewing society purely through materialist or structuralist explanations, Heddendorf emphasizes the importance of spiritual values, moral agency, and divine influence in shaping human relationships.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** Heddendorf’s critique engages with mainstream sociological theories, particularly those rooted in secular or relativist interpretations of society. He expands the conversation by arguing that faith-based perspectives contribute unique insights into moral order, community cohesion, and individual purpose—elements that are often downplayed in conventional sociological discourse.

**Contextualization:** This work is particularly relevant for discussions about the role of religion in contemporary sociology, ethics, and social policy. It challenges scholars to consider how faith traditions shape social norms, institutions, and collective meaning-making. Heddendorf’s approach aligns with broader debates on secularization, the persistence of religious belief in modern societies, and the interplay between faith and academic inquiry.

**Source Four:** Lierse, H., Lascombes, D.-K., & Becker, B. (2022). Caught in the middle! Wealth inequality and conflict over redistribution. *Social Justice Research, 35*(4), 345–367. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-022-00345

**Comment 4:** Lierse, Lascombes, and Becker’s 2022 study, *Caught in the Middle! Wealth Inequality and Conflict over Redistribution*, explores the tensions surrounding economic inequality and the differing perspectives on redistributive policies.

**Quote/Paraphrase:** The authors argue that middle-class individuals often find themselves in a paradoxical position regarding wealth redistribution. They state that “while economic elites resist redistribution, and lower-income groups advocate for it, middle-income earners exhibit ambivalent attitudes shaped by both self-interest and broader social concerns” (paraphrased).

**Essential Element**: The core theme of the study is the complex role the middle class plays in debates over redistribution. While traditional models focus primarily on the divide between wealthy elites and economically disadvantaged groups, this research highlights how middle-class perspectives can shift based on factors like economic security, political ideology, and exposure to inequality.

**Additive/Variant Analysis**: Lierse, Lascombes, and Becker build on previous inequality research by emphasizing the nuanced motivations behind redistributive preferences. Rather than presenting a binary class struggle, their work integrates psychological and economic elements, showing that middle-class attitudes toward redistribution are shaped by competing influences—such as personal economic concerns versus broader social equity considerations.

**Contextualization:** This study contributes to ongoing discussions in economic policy, social justice, and political science. It offers valuable insights for policymakers seeking to design redistribution strategies that balance economic growth with fairness. Additionally, it connects to wider debates about wealth stratification, public trust in government intervention, and the evolving role of the middle class in shaping economic policy.

**Source Five:** Lindh, A., & Andersson, A. B. (2024). Social networks and distributive conflict: The class divide in social ties and attitudes to income inequality across 29 countries. *European Sociological Review, 40*(2), 123–140. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcaa024

**Comment 5:** Lindh and Andersson’s 2024 study, *Social Networks and Distributive Conflict: The Class Divide in Social Ties and Attitudes to Income Inequality Across 29 Countries*, examines the connection between social networks and perspectives on economic inequality across diverse national contexts.

**Quote/Paraphrase**: The authors argue that class position significantly shapes both social ties and attitudes toward income inequality. They suggest that “social networks reinforce class-based perspectives on redistribution, with higher-income groups exhibiting lower support for egalitarian policies due to insulated social circles” (paraphrased).

**Essential Element:** At the heart of the study is the relationship between social networks and distributive conflict. The findings indicate that individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds form social ties that either challenge or reinforce existing economic disparities. Those in wealthier social circles are less exposed to financial hardship, shaping their attitudes toward inequality and redistribution.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** Lindh and Andersson build on previous research by integrating cross-national data, illustrating that the class divide in social networks has global implications. Their work expands on classical theories of inequality by emphasizing the role of social relationships in shaping political and economic attitudes, rather than merely focusing on individual financial status.

**Contextualization:** This study has significant implications for understanding how social environments influence policy attitudes, particularly in democratic societies where economic inequality remains a pressing issue. It informs discussions on polarization, economic mobility, and the social barriers that reinforce wealth disparities. The findings are especially relevant in policy design, where fostering cross-class interactions could mitigate entrenched divides in redistributive preferences.

**Source Six:** Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. Oxford University Press.

**Comment 6:** C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) is a seminal work that challenges individuals to connect personal experiences with broader societal structures, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking in sociology.

Quote/Paraphrase: Mills argues that the sociological imagination enables individuals to grasp the relationship between their personal lives and larger social forces. He suggests that “neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both” (paraphrased).

**Essential Element**: The fundamental concept in Mills’ work is the idea that personal struggles often stem from structural societal issues rather than individual failures. By developing a sociological imagination, people can move beyond limited personal viewpoints and recognize the historical and institutional forces shaping their experiences.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** Mills critiques conventional sociology for being too abstract and disconnected from real-world issues. He expands the field by urging scholars and citizens alike to engage critically with the intersection of biography and history, rejecting passive acceptance of social norms. Unlike rigid quantitative approaches, his method prioritizes critical reflection and intellectual engagement.

**Contextualization:** Mills’ work continues to influence sociology, political science, and social justice discussions, particularly in analyzing systemic inequalities and power dynamics. His call for intellectual responsibility resonates in contemporary debates on economic inequality, institutional oppression, and democratic participation. The concept of sociological imagination remains central in education and activism, encouraging individuals to question dominant narratives and seek structural solutions to societal problems.

**Source Seven:** Qureshi, Z. (2023). Rising inequality: A major issue of our time. *Brookings Institution*. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/research/rising-inequality-a-major-issue-of-our-time

**Comment 7**: Qureshi’s *Rising Inequality: A Major Issue of Our Time* (2023), published by the Brookings Institution, examines the growing disparities in wealth and income, arguing that inequality has become one of the most pressing global challenges.

**Quote/Paraphrase**: Qureshi highlights that rising inequality threatens economic stability and social cohesion. He suggests that “persistent disparities in wealth and income hinder sustainable growth and contribute to political and social fragmentation” (paraphrased).

**Essential Element:** The fundamental argument of the study is that inequality is not merely an economic issue but a societal one, influencing everything from democratic governance to financial stability. Qureshi emphasizes the urgency of policy intervention, advocating for structural reforms to ensure more equitable distribution of resources.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** Building on prior economic studies, Qureshi integrates historical trends and policy assessments, underscoring how globalization, technological shifts, and policy choices have exacerbated wealth concentration. Unlike previous analyses that focus primarily on national contexts, his work takes a broader, global perspective, identifying common patterns and challenges across different economies.

**Contextualization:** This research has significant implications for policymakers, economists, and social justice advocates. It informs discussions on tax reform, labor protections, and social welfare policies aimed at mitigating inequality. Additionally, it aligns with wider debates on economic justice, reinforcing calls for more inclusive growth strategies to counteract widening wealth gaps.

**Source Eight:** Smith, J., Parker, L., & Reed, A. (2022). Religious beliefs and mental health stigma: A sociological analysis. *Journal of Mental Health and Religion, 35*(2), 110–125. https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2022.2020345

**Comment 8**: Smith, Parker, and Reed’s 2022 study, *Religious Beliefs and Mental Health Stigma: A Sociological Analysis*, explores how religious ideologies influence perceptions of mental illness, analyzing the ways faith communities contribute to or mitigate stigma.

**Quote/Paraphrase:** The authors argue that religious beliefs shape attitudes toward mental health in both positive and negative ways. They suggest that “while some faith-based perspectives foster compassion and support, others reinforce stigma through moral or supernatural interpretations of mental illness” (paraphrased).

**Essential Element:** At the core of the study is the tension between religious frameworks and psychological understanding. Some religious traditions emphasize acceptance and healing, promoting mental health awareness, while others attribute mental illness to personal failing or spiritual deficiency, exacerbating stigma within faith-based communities.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** Smith, Parker, and Reed contribute to the existing discourse by examining the nuanced role of religious narratives. Unlike purely secular approaches to stigma research, their study highlights how differing theological interpretations influence the treatment and social inclusion of individuals with mental health conditions. They further discuss how interfaith dialogue and progressive religious leadership can reshape attitudes toward mental illness.

**Contextualization:** This study holds significant implications for mental health advocacy, policy development, and pastoral care. It reinforces the importance of educating religious leaders and congregations about psychological science to foster more supportive environments. Additionally, the findings align with broader discussions about how cultural and religious traditions interact with healthcare practices, influencing accessibility and perceptions of mental health treatment.

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