

MERTON'S ADAPTATION TYPOLOGY:
A RESEARCH TOOL FOR APPLIED
FEMINIST ORIENTED SOCIOLOGISTS

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Disdain is a common sentiment expressed in feminist literature for Parsons' functionalist model of the American family and gender roles. Parsons and Bales (1955) described the female gender role as expressive, and the male gender role as instrumental. A woman who plays her role properly gives rewarding responses so that she may receive a similar response of pleasure. She cares about immediate emotional responses of others. A man who plays his role properly interacts with others as a means to an end. In his instrumental role, he need not solicit positive emotional response, but must do what is needed to accomplish the task. The father takes the lead in social relations outside the family. He thus connects and adapts the family to the larger societal structure. The mother is obliged to lead in intra-family social relations. It is her duty to meet the emotional needs of family members, so the family will cohere as a unit. Parsons perceived gender roles in the family as complementary and unequal, with the instrumental role as the more important. Unequal gender roles seemed necessary for societal functioning.

Feminists reject Parsons' traditional model of the American family and gender roles because there is limited empirical support for his theory (Sherman 1971). The favored theoretical perspectives of feminists tend to come from conflict sociologists, and humanist, and radical sociologists, and not from the Parsonian branch of the functionalist school. Feminists and Parsonian functionalists make different assumptions about social change. Feminists are committed to changing the structure of society so that sexism is reduced or elim-

inated. Feminists think in terms of what can be, and how change can be implemented. Parsonian functionalists view extensive or abrupt social change as potentially disruptive, and therefore dysfunctional for the social order. They describe and rationalize what is, and are unconcerned with what ought to be.

As an applied sociologist with a feminist orientation, the author is concerned that others in such an uncomfortable position may throw out the baby with the bath water. The Parsonian branch of functionalism has its defects, but this perspective can be useful to feminists in their effort to reconstruct society.

MERTON'S ADAPTATION BEHAVIOR
TYPOLOGY

Merton's adaptation typology under Parsons' tutelage, is a valuable research tool which has been applied by sociologists to many social contexts, yielding testable hypotheses (Merton 1949). A review of anomie literature indicated that this typology has not been used by functionalists or feminists to describe patterns of gender role orientation (Cole & Zuckerman 1964).

Merton tried to show how deviant behavior is generated and produced by the social structure. He developed a typology of all logically possible ways people can adapt to a society characterized by disharmony in terms of cultural goals and legitimate means to reach these goals. Adaptive behavior may be a deviant response to such a social condition. He classified adaptive behavior in five types. 1) The conformist type accepts both the means and the goals of society. Most people adapt this way. 2) The innovator type accepts the cultural goals of society, but rejects the sanctioned means to achieve this goal. 3) The ritualist type rejects the cultural goals, but accepts the means provided by society. 4) The retreatist type initially accepts both the means and the goals of

society, but after experiencing insurmountable barriers which block success in achieving cultural goals, the person rejects both the means and the goals sanctioned by society. Merton's retreatists are the true aliens of society, because they are in the world, but not of the world. 5) Rebellion is the last type of adaptation. People in this category reject both the means and the cultural goals, but substitute new means and new cultural goals.

APPLYING MERTON'S MODEL TO

FEMINIST CONCERNS

There are three requirements for the feminist goal to alter society to make it more equitable between the sexes. 1) One must know how society is presently structured. 2) One must explore the scope and nature of social equality. 3) One must develop a strategy that will produce the desired results.

To illustrate the utility of Merton's model for feminists, the cultural goals and legitimate means to achieve the goals must be defined in a gender role context. A dominant cultural goal in our society is success (Williams 1960). Success is defined differently for men and for women. Men are successful if they reach high occupational status. Women are successful if they are "good wives and mothers." The institutionalized means for achieving a cultural goal are the prescribed and proscribed role norms of Parsons and Bales (1955). Presumably, acceptance of a cultural goal and the means to attain it by members of society maximizes predictability of behavior, and stabilizes the social structure.

Feminists have publicly challenged the legitimacy of this cultural goal, and the means to attain it, creating some confusion as to what are appropriate values and norms for men and women. Those who support traditional gender role ideology view feminists as social deviants.

CONFORMITY Identifying the conformist response is crucial in Merton's model, because all of the other adaptations hinge on what is considered normal. The conformist should aspire to the goal of success as traditionally defined for the sexes in society, and would accept and practice the institutionalized means of achieving success. The conformist enacts traditional gender role ideology.

RITUALISM The ritualist, like the conformist, accepts traditional gender role behavior as legitimate, but unlike the conformist, deviates by rejecting the traditional goal of being a successful woman or man. This deviant response occurs when a wife conforms obsessively to her ascribed gender role, but destroys the personal relationship she has with her husband and children. Her gender role is played without substance or feeling. Her marriage is an empty shell maintaining only the form.

The husband who takes his provider role seriously is forced to retire because of his age, and then assumes a low-paying nonprestigious job just to keep busy. He is the male ritualist. He knows his status will never be as high as before retirement. He perceives being productive in the world of work as better than not working at all. The regulatory nature of work gives him the structure he requires in life.

RETREATISM The retreatist initially accepts the cultural goal of success and the means for achieving his success, but then abandons both the goal and the means. The female retreatist may devote much of her life to being what she considers a good wife and mother. But her conformity to traditional gender role ideology does not produce the desired outcome. Her husband divorces her, and she abuses her children. Her lack of marital and family success may cause her to question the value

of marriage, and the "sacrifice" she presumes to have made to comply with society's expectations. Not knowing what to be or do, she adapts by withdrawing from society.

The male retreatist may reject occupational success and the prescribed gender role behavior because he finds through experience that he can not overcome the obstacles to career advancement. He may be aged, illiterate, handicapped, or member of a minority group. Instead of lowering his occupational aspirations as a ritualist would do, or facing the reality of failure, he may retreat into a fantasy world of minimal pressure, perhaps becoming an alcoholic or a drug addict.

INNOVATION A female innovator accepts the goal of successful womanhood as defined in traditional terms, but she does not conform to the culturally sanctioned means to achieve the goal. Situations where this might be the case are: 1) A woman active in women's rights may strive to be a good wife and mother, and to be an equal partner in marriage. 2) A "traditional" woman may be a matriarch only because her husband cannot make decisions. 3) A woman may live with a man and hope that he will eventually marry her and father her children.

The male innovator values occupational success because it is a symbol of manhood, but finds conventional norms nonproductive of goal attainment. He may engage in white collar crime or organized crime. A professional man may exploit his wife through his occupation by having her do his research without crediting her when his book is published. He may moonlight or put in unduly long hours in order to increase his salary and occupational status.

REBELLION When both sexes reject both the means and the cultural goal of success, and substitute new means and goals, a re-

bellion mode of adaptation occurs. Radical feminists would enter this category. They would redefine the cultural goal of success, and establish new means of achieving it. Men and women would not have to conform to gender roles, because there would be no need for them in the new social structure. The definition of success would be the same for everyone. If the new cultural goal were realization of human potential, women would feel no pressure to marry or have children to feel womanly. Men would feel no pressure to climb career ladders at the expense of being good fathers and husbands. Men and women would respond to each other as if they were human beings occupying particular positions in the social structure.

THE NATURE OF SOCIAL EQUALITY

Feminist literature indicates that people who belong to the Women's Movement do not have a coherent ideology (Freeman 1979). Members know that they oppose sexism in its various forms, but are disunited on what they support. The common thread of opposition to sexism is not enough to bind the disparate groups of the Movement. Lesbians, nuns, prostitutes, white middle class professionals, black domestics, college students, radicals, and reformers do not constitute a harmonious consensual group. Each of these groups brings different ideas of what equality or liberty should be, and what strategy will best alter the situation. In time, feminists of various persuasions will move closer to each other regarding goals and strategy, as evidenced by the National Women's Conference held in Houston, Texas in 1977. Merton's typology may be a useful research tool to speed up the cohesion process in the movement.

Alice Rossi (1972) identified three basic models of equality which she derived from minority relations theory. These are the pluralistic, assimilation, and

hybrid models. In the pluralistic form of equality, men would be recognized as different from women, but as socially equal. The model assumes that separate but equal status for the sexes is possible. In the assimilation model, women would be brought into the main stream of society, making the sex distribution relatively equal in such fields as work, sport, religion, leisure, and law. This model assumes that males should continue to set the standards for behavior of both sexes. For example, women would have greater opportunity to enter the male job market, but must compete according to the rules established and maintained by men who endorse a traditional gender role ideology.

The hybrid model is revolutionary rather than reformist. It rejects both traditional sociological assumptions about men and women, and the existing institutional structures. This model would bring about greater changes in the role of men than of women, because the required institutional changes involve a total restructuring of occupational and political social systems. The hybrid model seeks a new breed of women and men, and a new vision of the future. Feminists who reject traditional gender role ideology may endorse one of these three models of equality. Merton's model could be used to identify the members of the Woman's Movement, and the kind of equality each type seeks, and what they would do to achieve it.

DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGY

Merton's means/ends schema is so flexible that feminists may be able to use it to sort out the myriad number of issues that concern them. Not only can the model help clarify the nature and scope of equality, but particular issues, like ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution (ERA), legislation providing public facilities

for child care, alternative marriage relations, or flexible work schedules can be explored. Each of these issues can be treated as a cultural goal. The task of the sociologist feminist is to identify the goal and behaviors to facilitate goal attainment.

Ability to achieve the cultural goal of gender role success by available means is differentially distributed through a social system. Different modes of deviant behavior are concentrated in varying social strata. There are ten testable hypotheses.

- 1) Lower class women who define themselves as religious fundamentalists, and are divorced or separated from their husbands, and abuse their children, will disproportionately respond as retreatists.
 - 2) White working class males who head households, and are politically conservative, physically handicapped, or unemployed will disproportionately respond as retreatists.
 - 3) Lower class mothers who are black and single will disproportionately respond as innovators.
 - 4) Men proprietors with large families will disproportionately respond as innovators.
 - 5) Lower white collar married women who have a high school education or less, a poor self-concept, and who define themselves as religious, will disproportionately respond as ritualists.
 - 6) Lower white collar men who were forced to retire from their jobs because of age, and who now work part time in a lower paying job, will disproportionately respond as ritualists.
 - 7) Lower white collar men with families intact, who define themselves as religious, will disproportionately respond as conformists.
 - 8) Lower white collar married women with preschool children who define themselves as religious, have a positive self-concept, and have worked for pay at least one year, will disproportionately respond as conformists.
 - 9) Married professional career wo-
- (Concluded on page 157)

accumulating relative power, as represented by tokens, tend to use power to dominate the task situation and coerce tokens from other players. As the less powerful perceive this threat, they tend to develop social arrangements to protect themselves, usually by pooling their tokens and placing them in the hands of a single representative who then wields power far beyond that of the individuals he or she has contracted to represent. This process demonstrates not only coalition formation and maintenance, by primary and secondary groups, as a practical means of competing and surviving, but the tendency for such social systems to have a division of labor, with positions and roles, using an implicit or explicit ranking which reflects esteem, or prestige, and the mechanisms of social control, such as norms, rules, and sanctions. To the extent that a newly formed coalition is successful, it becomes a threat to others, tending to force further coalition formation, simulating monopolies and arms races. Play of the game, and subsequent discussion can be used to demonstrate and identify many of the fundamental processes involved in social behavior. These can be used to illustrate theory construction, using dynamic models, like Figure 1, or propositional format, like Figure 2. Finally, it should be noted that SIMSIM, compared to more elaborate prepackaged games, tends to challenge students to develop more sophisticated simulations, which in effect, stimulates them to participate in theory building, which is one of the central roles of the sociologist as a scientist.

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men with children, who are aware that they have been or are now the victim of sex discrimination at work, and who believe they have strong marriages, will disproportionately respond as rebels. 10) Married men who value family life over high occupational status, and who believe they have strong marriages, will disproportionately respond as rebels.

CONCLUSION Identification of deviant behaviors among various populations should provide an empirical foundation for feminists desiring to develop and implement a practical strategy for social change. If populations responding as ritualists were identified by a researcher, then it may be wise to have respected feminist clergy or liberal male clergy approach these populations as social change agents. For each population identified by type of adaptation, a particular type of social change agent is required.

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