

PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY PARADIGMS

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INTRODUCTION

Most phenomenologists address micro-sociological issues, emphasizing the individual as the ultimate unit of analysis. Although this approach exposes the *creative* rather than the *socialized* actor, a major criticism of phenomenological sociology is its inapplicability to macrosociological analysis, often resulting in a structural and ahistorical explanation with indifference to ecological, economic, demographic and political variables.

Friedman, (1974), presents a challenging innovation to phenomenology's tradition of viewing the individual as the center of reality. By defining the essential dynamic of social life as "interhuman," Friedman opens a theoretical channel to the phenomenological study of larger societal issues. While Husserl transforms everyday life into a reality of experiences, meanings and ideas molded by the individual into a personal world, Friedman contends that people create social worlds through meetings or interactions within social structures. Since the image of man exists between man and man, culture, society and institutions are no longer imposing and impersonal but instead become the loci for the communication processes inherent to societal group life. Because Friedman views the basis of social life as "we," discarding both the dimensions of the mass and the individual, his hidden human image is dialogical, transforming functional institutions into a community conducive to conversations resulting from person-to-person interactions.

For Friedman, community, a reality defined by Mehan and Wood (1975) as an interactional entity, becomes the major unit of analysis in phenomenological sociology. This concept of community incorporates mutually understandable typology of intersubjective existence, a theme addressed by Husserl, "the other is a necessary condition for the existence of the world"; Hegel, "one's self-consciousness depends on the reality of the other's self-consciousness"; Heidegger, "reality is being in the world"; and Sartre, "when the other enters, I am no longer master of a situation."

Because the community is the arena of

societal activity, it has been a topic of investigation for centuries. Community-related classics include Plato's *Republic*, More's *Utopia* and Orwell's *1984*. Sociologists contended that the moral, philosophical and utopian themes of these works lacked the value-free orientation of the scientific method. In their contribution to the intellectual analysis of society, sociologists have focused on objective empirical descriptions answering "what is" instead of subjective interpretations indicating "how it is" or "why it is" in the community.

DURKHEIM AND TONNIES

The theoretical cornerstone in the sociology of community was set by Durkheim (1893) was written when the city was arising as a new form of social organization. Although Durkheim's explanation of the mechanics of advanced society provides insight into how people relate to each other in a society characterized by organic solidarity, his approach reflects a positivist orientation in that the order of the social structure is given priority over the social relations within the society. Since Durkheim's organic solidarity is characterized by order, regulation and consensus, his paradigm focuses on the equilibrium produced by the coordinating functions. Durkheim, establishes an I-Them rather than an I-We relationship amongst the individuals within the community.

The advanced sociological statistics of the mainline positivistic journal articles originated in the *Division of Labor* when Durkheim introduced the use of statistics to verify immigration trends. Furthermore, it was Durkheim who exposed the concept of the complex, densely populated and anonymous city, never mentioning the existence of community life within the city. Yet, Durkheim's recognition of the psychological processes of urban living such as the individual's liberation from the "collective curiosity" of the small community which showed potential for phenomenological analysis remained outside his perspective. Instead, he incorporated historical and anthropological analysis with sociological research techniques to a society in which individuals had liberty but were basically expressions of the society. The

"essence" of Durkheim's analysis is the functioning of institutions, not the ideas or relations of people.

Tonnies' *Community And Society* (1887) constitutes a theoretical masterpiece within the sociology of community. Tonnies' social-psychological perspective which analyzes the development of community in relation to social bonds introduced *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, two frequently cited ideal constructs devised to trace the mentality of the community from folk culture to advanced society. Tonnies focuses on the relationship between personal relations and community types, defining interactions as largely impersonal and contractual in the cities. Although Tonnies' work addressed phenomenological issues, his perspective preceded the later phenomenological and symbolic interactionist ideology.

While Redfield and Wirth classify types of environment (*Gemeinschaft* or *Gesellschaft*) according to the degree of primary or secondary relations, their critical variable is population size. Redfield (1947), describes behavior in rural communities as "spontaneous," "uncritical," and "impersonal" attributing Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft* characteristic to the physical condition of the community's "smallness" while neglecting to expatiate on the nature or effects of primary relations within the community. Thus, Redfield fails to explain the dynamics of intimate personal relations involving the full personalities of individuals. By merely citing the existence of primary relations, Redfield presents a visual, not a dialogical, theory of community.

Wirth, (1938), responds to Tonnies' *Gesellschaft* concluding that secondary relations prevail over primary relations in the city. Like Redfield, Wirth does not develop his thesis using a phenomenological framework. In a positivist vein, he stresses the relation between the ecological concepts of number, density, heterogeneity and social processes such as segregation, mobility and deviance. Wirth's theory provides minimal insight into effects of mass social processes on the "we" dimension of community.

Bernard (1973), identifies the ecological, rural-urban, class and leadership paradigms as the four major modern models that have generated the most empirical research in

sociology's analysis of the community.

ECOLOGICAL PARADIGM

Human ecology, analogous to plant and animal ecology, maintains that social institutions with corresponding personality types locate in the environment in accordance with the outcome of such processes as competition, invasion and succession. As a consequence of emphasizing these biologically correlated processes, spatial relations, competition and natural areas rank as pivotal conceptions in classical human ecology.

The major criticism of classical ecology is its revival of biological determinism, best represented by social Darwinism. Opponents attack the emphasis placed on the biologically correlated processes of the geographical environment in influencing social relations. The classical ecologists exposed deviance, crime, gangs, poverty and other phenomena associated with urban problems, but their relationship between behavior and territory was based more on physical than social variables.

The ecological approach is shifting from the classical to the sociocultural-political model in which the physical perspective of the city is coordinated with the history, culture and social life of the residents. Conventional sociologists of community might promote sociocultural determinism or political determinism, by regarding ethnic traits and political decisions as natural products of a certain type of sociocultural urban territory. Long (1958) provides an example of political determinism. He contends that political decisions are unconscious and unplanned by virtue of being territorially bound, and elicits the similarities between natural and political ecology, providing a social-political version of evolution and natural selection.

The focus of the sociocultural political model remains undeveloped due to adherence to the positivist concept of social interaction. Sociocultural-political ecologists continue to view social interaction as established rather than emergent, focusing on "the way" people act rather than assessing the meanings given to social actions (Boguslaw, 1965). If the ecologist were to conduct phenomenological research, he would not correlate patterns of political behavior with territorial types relying on generalized census data and factual ac-

counts of community decisions, but would optimize use of the participant observation method by analyzing what political decisions "mean" to each political group. This generates a knowledge of political perspectives rather than the territorial mapping of political decisions.

RURAL-URBAN PARADIGM

The rural-urban paradigm is used in the sociology of community. Fischer has contributed significantly to this model. His crucial variable is population concentration which is derived from Durkheim and the human ecologists. According to Fischer (1975), sub-cultural behavioral expressions, which are necessary to the diversity of urban life and distinguish rurals from urbanites, are facilitated by population concentration. If Fischer were to step out of his positivist framework, his theory would become ripe for phenomenological analysis. The existence of a subculture implies a set of values and norms structuring an experiential lifestyle. Yet, Fischer does not explore these dimensions of his subcultural theory because his positivism does not take him beyond the locational description of urban subcultures.

The current trend to treat *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* as interrelated conditions in both the small town and the city deviates from Redfield's earlier rural-urban continuum in which the small town and the city were regarded as polar opposite environments. Gans (1962) facilitated this modern sociological attitude by rejecting the distinction between rural and urban since most of society is urban. Gans replaced ecological variables with social characteristics such as social class, life-cycle stage and ethnicity as indicators of community organization and behavior. However, the social characteristics were incorporated in positivist research rather than in a phenomenologically interpretive scheme. This produced a description of social characteristics instead of an evaluation of how they construct reality. The positivists hide the true human image which can only be uncovered through a realization of communication processes among people sharing a certain type of social class, ethnic background and life-cycle stage.

As sociologists have refocused from the general to the specific, replacing the

ecologists' emphasis on institutions with the study of specific groups. Kornblum (1974), chooses the political ward of the South Chicago neighborhoods to uncover inter-ethnic primary relations in factories, neighborhood taverns and political groups. Kornblum's intellectual probing into the "essence" of the relations among ethnic groups must be derived from observations, statistically verified, on such community patterns as ethnic voting preferences, ethnic residential-distribution, education and recreation. These are interpreted not as patterns but as phenomena based on meanings, values and ideas organizing the residents' everyday world.

CLASS PARADIGM

A third model in community studies is the class paradigm. Until the 1940's, stratification was based solely on objectively quantifiable data such as education, occupation and income. Warner (1971) stratified the population into six classes using an interactional approach in which groups define each other's status based on their associations in the community. By including "local" interpretations of class standing, Warner combined subjective interpretation with what Bell and Newby (1971) describe as the scientific model of stratification. Warner's interactional method of stratification incorporates attitudes and lifestyles with statistical information presenting a marked difference from an ecologist's attributional technique of stratifying various regions of the city according to economic criteria.

Gans' analysis (1962), free of scales and indices, defines class as a way of life, emphasizing attitudes and motives of a working-class Italian population. Because class is not only a product of income and status but also reflects the way in which the values of a population affect participation in all aspects of living, including education, occupation, politics, family, religion, local community and the outside world, Gans' analysis is phenomenological but has not been recognized as such.

In his study of the Boston West End, Gans locates the essence of social interactions within the ideational framework of individuals. People live in a world of ideas as they orient themselves to the life-world (*lebenswelt*). This body of ideas develops as a result of observations and experiences within the *lebenswelt*

which have become meaningful. Thinking which embodies these ideas is the underlying dynamic involved in the construction of social reality (Cicourel, 1973).

Although there are ethnic divisions, the working class of the South Chicago neighborhoods is cohesive since this stratum as a unit is a political force operating in the interest of various ethnic groups (Kornblum 1974). This union of class, ethnicity and politics indicates sociological recognition of subcultures/subsocieties within the city. In this stratification model Kornblum also incorporates human ecology. He discusses the ecological processes in terms of the position power of political groups. The established ethnic groups live in the "second" settlements of the area and have advanced from union to ward politics and exemplify the concept of "ethnic succession." This analysis is more ecological than social-psychological. As a result, his concerns become the effects of inter-ethnic contacts rather than the dynamics of interacting groups. Kornblum's analysis is more positional than ideational.

The class paradigm has transformed itself from a methodological device to a social-psychological investigation of value orientation in a subcultural system. Kornblum's current work which unites class, ethnicity and politics indicates a return to an ecological orientation while neglecting to develop the social-psychology/phenomenology approach.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the sociology of community's positivistic orientation, evidenced in the four major paradigms, Hillery's (1955) abstraction of sixteen concepts from the analysis of 94 definitions makes reference to "geographical area," "common ties" and "social interaction" as the three essential components of community. In the positivistic framework, however, common ties are merely the result of the inevitable social interactional processes. As a result, geographical area holds top position within the sociology of community's hierarchy of concepts.

Conventional sociologists have not substantively revised their definition of community, but their locational focus is changing in response to decentralization. Boulding (1963) contends that the postcivilization cities of our

times are becoming decentralized due to technical communication replacing face-to-face dialogue in the economic and political affairs of the central city, the automobile extending urbanites cross-city contacts and the search for community in a predominantly urban-oriented society. Consequently, the community is no longer being depicted as a system of interrelated neighborhoods and the urban neighborhood is replacing the often deteriorating downtown area as the main unit of sociological analysis. The city is becoming a community of communities.

Recognizing the city as a set of communities is prerequisite to phenomenological analysis. but this analysis will not take place unless the conceptual framework and methods are also phenomenological. Its paradigms carry the potential for phenomenological analysis but positivistic methods and theories hinder phenomenological interpretation.

The sociologist of community continues to be a participant observer, combining survey methods such as the questionnaire with the unstructured interview and other face-to-face methods. Such an approach seems conducive to uncovering the psychological/philosophical foundations organizing the activities of everyday life. Studies indicate the contrary, illustrating that the sociological world view focuses on events, conditions, normative patterns and similar obvious details. For the conventional sociologist, historical, socio-economic and institutional analyses explain community life in terms of ethnicity, assimilation, urban migration, economic shifts and technological inventions. Lacking is the eidetic reduction which would introduce a subjective view indicating how people react or feel about these patterns affecting their lives. The application of the eidetic reduction is not contingent upon sophisticated research techniques. Rather, it is a matter of asking questions which probe the concealed essence. Furthermore, phenomenological analysis would still provide information on ethnicity, assimilation and such topics but the perspective would be subjective, not objective. The difference between phenomenological sociology and conventional sociology is not necessarily dissimilar topics of focus but another viewpoint on mutually visible social phenomena.

A major misconception on the part of con-

ventional sociology, stifling its integration with phenomenology, is the notion of the latter's inability to recognize social problems. Such criticism might have been more justified when the individual was identified as the center of reality. However, Friedman's recent thesis of inter-human reality translates into community. In its true sense, community means the recognition of social-economic-political problems since they constitute the dynamics of interhuman associations. Again, the interpretation differs from conventional sociology in that exposure of these problems in phenomenological terms depicts human experiences such as injustice and inequality rather than sociological concepts like deviance and segregation.

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