

Inside: Stryker on challenges to theory growth (p1); Section activities at ASA (p7); Go on theoretical disobedients (p9); Elias on DuBois (10).

Perspectives

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Chair's Corner: Challenges to the Growth of Sociological Theory and the Theory Section

Robin Stryker

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In keeping with the spirited ongoing debates in our Section Newsletter about the nature and role of sociological theory, last year's ASA Theory Mini-conference, organized by 2005 Section Chair Murray Webster, included a panel on the growth of sociological theory. When asked to participate in this panel, I immediately noticed that I was odd person out in our gang of four panelists. The panel included three eminent formal theorists--Joe Berger, Willie Jasso, and Dave Willer. Then there was yours truly--someone who has on occasion made use of the tools of formal theory, but more frequently finds herself drawn to a style of theoretical work more suited to comparative historical inquiry of a distinctly Weberian bent (Stryker 1989, Pedriana and Stryker 2004).

In preparing for the panel, I had pleasant flashbacks of my years at the University of Iowa, known for its Theory Workshop, established by Willie and through which I had met Murray, Joe and Dave and become educated about formal theory many years before. Preparing my remarks for the panel, I decided to put my desire to participate in multiple "theoretical cultures" (Lamont 2004) to good use. I took the panel as an occasion to point out that, despite our more usually rehearsed disagreements, formal theorists and those of us with more Weberian tendencies nonetheless have key things in common that enable both styles of theorist to contribute to the growth of sociological theory.

What follows is an adaptation of my remarks, focusing on challenges of theory growth in sociology and how these relate to challenges of growing the Theory Section. As befits someone who revels in mining case studies for their potential more general theoretical significance, I base my essay about these challenges on two of my own inter-related research programs. One of these has been around the politics of social science in state law making

and enforcement, and the other has been around legitimacy processes, reproduction and change in institutional fields.

Most of the theoretical knowledge I have generated has come not from formal deductive theorizing but from a methodology of theory construction I call *strategic narrative* (Stryker 1996). In contrast to those who assert that theoretical knowledge grows only through research programs fueled by formal theorizing, I show that theoretical knowledge also grows through strategic narrative. I then suggest that, although the plurality of definitions of theory mostly has been an obstacle to theory growth, it also represents opportunities. Meanwhile, definitional pluralism has operated mostly as an opportunity for growing the Theory Section, but under some conditions, it would not remain so. Because we will continue to have definitional pluralism, we should use what we have learned doing theory and research to get the most intellectual and institutional opportunity and the least intellectual and institutional constraint out of our definitional pluralism.

I. How Theory Grows Through Strategic Narrative

Strategic narrative is a sensitizing framework for thinking about and doing the history-theory relationship in qualitative, historical research.¹ When I first suggested strategic narrative, narrative was on the rise among historical sociologists. Some of us thought narrative was an adjunct to comparative methods aimed at building conditional causal statements about social structures and processes. Others had a much more radical, anti-generalizing, replacement strategy in mind.

Like formal theorists, I am partial to building general propositions about relationships among social phenomena and to thinking in terms of causal mechanisms. However, I also am partial to deep engagement with primary historical evidence and to interpreting historical event sequences. Believing that cumulating social science knowledge is possible and desirable, I proposed a Weber-inspired complement to formal-theoretical modes of building sociological knowledge. I intended my strategic narrative frame to suggest that *some* stories and ways of constructing stories promote general theory building more than others. This enables more

effective knowledge accumulation and contributes to the growth of sociological theory, while also interpreting and explaining how and why specific concrete events happened as they did and not otherwise.

From my dissertation on the unceremonious ousting of economists from the pre-World War II National Labor Relations Board (see Stryker 1989) forward through my work of the early 1990s, I had oriented my case-oriented comparisons to applying sensitizing frameworks and producing explicit concepts and testable research hypotheses. I understood this as my own little contribution to building theory. But my rules of engagement were different from those of the formal theorist—and they also contained a different view of the relationship between theory and evidence than the strict hypothesis testing view that I had applied in my pre-dissertation publications using quantitative methods (e.g., Stryker 1981).

To communicate what I now did and its relative advantages and disadvantages, I suggested four key aspects of strategic narrative. First, in strategic narrative, there is a concurrent construction and mutual adjustment of history and theory, with each defined and built with reference to the other. Second, in strategic narrative, there is selection and construction of history in response to a clearly developed abstract and general theoretical backdrop, with attention to how that backdrop conditions the building of history.

Third, in strategic narrative, there is construction of a theoretical and historical anomaly as the starting point for a phased in comparative research design, with each phase building narratives and comparisons around key events to answer specific theoretical questions. All phases cumulate to respond to the full range of general theoretical issues motivating the research design. Fourth, in strategic narrative, there is formulation of clear precise concepts, measures and coding techniques to build history as both path-dependent action sequence and complex institutional and cultural context/conjuncture.

To consider how strategic narrative promotes the growth of sociological theory, it is useful to refract the strategic narrative frame of reference against the nature of theory growth through theoretical research programs, as delineated about

twenty years ago by formal theorists David Wagner and Joseph Berger (1985). Case-oriented comparativists might be surprised to learn that near the end of their article, Wagner and Berger point out that what is essentially their rudimentary theory of theory growth “emerged only in the analysis of specific concrete cases of theoretical growth in sociology” (Wagner and Berger 1985, p. 724-25).

My first point of refraction requires elaborating slightly on the first tenet of strategic narrative. On the one hand, in strategic narrative, theory building is an overtime process involving continual interplay and mutual adjustment of history and theory. First, one takes some concrete and particular historical configurations or sets of events and one conceptualizes them in terms of abstract and general concepts and sensitizing frameworks. One uses these to select and interpret primary and secondary historical evidence, rendering it all intelligible both as historical narratives and historical comparisons. The conceptually constructed and theoretically interpreted narratives and comparisons provide the basis for developing conditional causal generalizations that re-specify the original theoretical questions, generate new theoretical questions and provide hypotheses that subsequent empirical research is designed to examine. Strategic narrative grounds generalizations about causal relations in inductive inference. But it systematically and explicitly incorporates logical, deductive reasoning to elucidate causal mechanisms.

On the other hand, Wagner and Berger (1985) distinguished between the kind of theory growth that occurs through the relationship between theory and data and another kind—which they find more interesting and important—that occurs through the relationship among theories. According to Wagner and Berger, three ideal typical growth processes involving relationships among theories in theoretical research programs are theory elaboration, theory proliferation and theory competition. Whereas *theory elaboration* involve[s] increases in the scope, rigor, precision or empirical adequacy of a theory,” *theory proliferation* involves using “ideas from one theory to generate theory concerned with a new or different sociological problem or data base” (Wagner and Berger 1985, p. 707). *Theory competition* arises when multiple theories make conflicting predictions for the same turf (see Wagner

and Berger 1985, p. 708).

Comparing strategic narrative directly to Wagner and Berger’s ideal typical theoretical growth processes emphasizes that a research program conceptualized and executed as strategic narrative does *not* allow one to make a neat distinction between confronting theory with data and confronting theory with theory. Instead, the *same* process through which the researcher confronts theory with evidence is *also* a process involving theory elaboration, theory proliferation and often also theory competition. As such, strategic narrative is as much a methodology for growing theory as it is a methodology for empirical research. On cursory examination, strategic narrative may appear antithetical to formal theorizing. However, as I will illustrate below, strategic narrative is like formal theory construction in growing theory through theory elaboration, theory proliferation and theory competition.

My second point of refraction elaborates on tenet three of strategic narrative; that it is useful to begin what ultimately will become a comparative research design by constructing a narrative capitalizing on an anomaly. Thomas Kuhn (1970) emphasized how within-paradigm theory specification and growth occurs through confrontation with anomalies. To be sure, anomalies and puzzle solving are involved in formal theoretical work. But I would argue that qualitative, historical sociologists in general and strategic narrativists in particular are especially good at puzzle solving.

Confronting and resolving anomalies often results in further conditionalization of the theory, or in new scope conditions or in enhanced precision and/or in enhanced generality. In short, it results in theory growth of precisely the sorts signaled by Wagner and Berger when they speak of such mechanisms as *theory elaboration* and *proliferation*. Confronting and solving anomalies in strategic narrative also may lead to one or more of the different types of *theory integration* that Wagner and Berger especially highlight as productive of theory growth. For Wagner and Berger (1985, p. 722), theory integration covers situations in which a new theory “consolidates many of the ideas found in two prior theories in a single formulation, usually suggesting interrelationships between those ideas...the new theory usually generates additional

predictions not made by either earlier theory.”

However, what strategic narrative also highlights about anomalies is that these do not just appear, as it were to “speak for themselves.” Instead, anomalies are theoretically constructed and they often also are highly contested. For the purposes of this essay, I leave the contested part aside to focus on the theoretical construction of anomalies. One example close to home comes from my narrative about elimination of economists at the National Labor Relations Board (Stryker 1989). This particular narrative became useful for general theory building only when I realized that what happened was contrary to the expanding state reliance on science that one could draw out as a prediction from the then major, and otherwise divergent, class and state centered perspectives on the relationship between government and science in advanced capitalist democracies.

Paradoxically, otherwise conflict-oriented perspectives on the state gave rise to theories about government use of science that removed conflict. I inserted it back into the equation and began with the assumption that variation in government reliance on scientific expertise is a political process involving resource mobilization and counter-mobilization around competing interests, values and cognitive frames. Then I analyzed what happened to produce the anomaly of the NLRB so that I could develop more general hypotheses that could be further examined empirically through additional, theoretically constructed comparisons.¹

Refracting all this through the lens provided by Wagner and Berger (1985), my hypotheses represent *theory proliferation*—taking political perspectives and applying them to additional phenomena. The hypotheses also represent *theory elaboration*—further specifying a conceptual apparatus and then proposing conditions under which government use of science contracts vs. expands. Along the way, I encountered some *theory competition* from the non-political perspectives then dominant in law and social science scholarship. This prompted me to show that whereas some predictions drawn from non-political law and social science theoretical perspectives were *not* supported by empirical research, hypotheses from these non-political perspectives that *did* have empirical support could also be derived from my political theoretical

perspective. In short, my political framework competed with non-political frameworks in some respects, and in others it was the more general perspective.

To leap frog over numerous additional small advances of different types, at a certain point I realized that the same literature on the relationship between government and science that had inspired my dissertation also involved conflicting predictions about legitimacy outcomes for the same set of phenomena. I tried to resolve the *theory competition* I discerned with some *theory integration* specifying *for whom, under what conditions and through what causal mechanisms* (including cognitive-constitutive, normative-evaluative and instrumental mechanisms) mobilizing science would legitimate or delegitimate legal authorities, actors and institutions (Stryker 1994). I then generated new predictions for situations involving combinations of these causal mechanisms. Even further along the way came additional *proliferation*, this time to theories and research in organizational sociology on reproduction and change in institutional fields.

I realized that just as Habermas had been wrong to presume that reliance on science invariably depoliticizes and legitimates government policy making in advanced capitalism, so many new institutional theorists were wrong in one respect in a way similar to Habermas (Stryker 2000). New institutionalists emphasizing the cognitive pillar of organizations presumed that institutionalization involved generating a taken-for-grantedness about the way things are. This would tend to prevent political conflicts of interest and value.

I conditionalized this assumption or prediction, to show when it is, and is not, likely to hold both within organizations and in broader organizational and institutional fields. I argued that given conditions likely to prevail in modernity, the same cognitive aspect of institutions that under some conditions depoliticizes would be even *more* likely to stimulate intra- and inter-organizational conflicts of interest and value (Stryker 2000, 2003).

In sum, the upshot of my second point of refraction is the same as the upshot of my first. *Strategic narrative is a good way to produce theory growth.* Both strategic narrative and formal theorizing help grow sociological theories and theory. General theory building may come more

theory. General theory building may come more slowly through strategic narrative than through formal theorizing. However, general theory building through strategic narrative will be coupled with achieving a goal that formal theorizing does not claim—that of constructing and correcting the historical record itself.

II. Inter-relationship between Theory Growth and Theory Section Growth

Our failure to come to agreement on a definition of theory represents both constraint and opportunity. In this age of section fragmentation, the Theory Section has been around for quite awhile. We are highly institutionalized and have about 800 members. We are not as large as the Gender Section, but we also are not near as small as a number of sections hovering around the ASA-established minimum threshold of 300.

Ours is a “big tent” and we define our organizational identity with the word “theory.” But our mission statement on the web is analogous to many legal statutes I have examined. For example, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 does not define employment discrimination. Similarly, our section statement does not define theory. It just says “the purpose of the Section on Theory is to foster the development of this aspect of sociology through the organized interchange of ideas, teaching experience, research programs and results.”

If I were to rehearse even a partial run-down of the multiple, influential definitions of theory that we harbor in our big tent, it might cause you to think of the title of a recent Theory Section award winning book, Andrew Abbott’s *Chaos of Disciplines*. Here I’m invoking chaos in its everyday conversational sense, which is only part of what Andy meant to invoke with the term.

Recent Theory Section Chair Michèle Lamont has advanced a positive view of our members’ definitional and accompanying task diversity, viewing our pluralism of “theoretical cultures” as a source of strength for sociology (Lamont 2004). Current Sociological Theory editor Julia Adams likewise has endorsed pluralism, specifically as the most appropriate strategy for the journal. I would suggest that our plurality of definitions and practices of doing theory makes it a real challenge to have a productive, inclusive,

collective conversation that identifies *all* the ways that theory grows and *all* the challenges to that growth. Clearly, if and how we view sociological theories or theory as growing depends on how we define theory (see also Lamont 2004). Plurality of theoretical cultures allows for exciting dialogue and cross-fertilization. However, we are not always inclined to do the translation work across theoretical cultures required to have a meaningful discussion, let alone productive cross-fertilization. I have tried to do a bit of such translation work in this essay.

At the same time, retaining ambiguity about what theory is has created an opportunity for the Theory Section to recruit broadly and to grow ourselves as a loose coalition around a core value—theory—on which we can agree, even when we don’t agree on what that core value means in practice. I draw this observation directly from concepts and propositions I and my co-author Nicholas Pedriana developed about the social role played by ambiguity and value centrality of key discursive terms, such as equality (Pedriana and Stryker 1997). More generally, conceptual ambiguity can be an effective means of social movement recruitment, coalition building and political compromise.

That is one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is that as members in a loose coalition of people who do theory, we also inevitably use the grand banner of theory and the widely agreed-upon centrality of theory in sociology to promote what we ourselves do. This promotes competition and conflict within our section and more broadly within sociology as a whole. That in turn has ramifications both for our internal section dynamics and for our external audiences.

First, if conflict gets intense, frequent and general enough within the section, the section could splinter. That would be bad for the section in terms of the money we commandeer from the ASA and for the number of sessions we are allowed to have at the annual meeting. Recent suggestions to split *Sociological Theory* into multiple journals (I regard this as a bad idea) are born from, and further promote internal section tensions.

Second, in terms of our external audiences, including government funders and policy makers, the knowledge we produce is delegitimated through what I have termed cognitive or constitutive mechanisms. In fields like economics, for good or

for ill in terms of the substance of knowledge produced and interests and values served by economists, there *is* more internal consensus on theoretical culture. This in turn produces more legitimacy through cognitive-constitutive mechanisms (see Stryker 1994, 2000). This is only one of the reasons why economics has more external legitimacy than we do, but it surely is *a* reason.

All this suggests the following conundrum for the Theory Section. We need ambiguity to keep the section together and to allow the widest possible swatch of us to maintain our valued identities as theorists. But just like a political coalition that gets into government on a broad banner and then falls apart in internecine squabbles about what that banner really means in practice, the Theory Section too could fall apart pretty if any group of us gets too aggressive about mobilizing the banner of theory in the *exclusive* promotion of our more specific intellectual agendas and interests.

Yet when each of us defines and operationalizes theory in practice, we need clarity about what we are doing and we need to communicate clearly about what we are doing. If we fail to do so, we will not contribute to theory growth.

So what do we do assuming that: 1) we are never going to agree on a single definition of theory; 2) we need clarity about what we are doing within our particular theoretical culture so that we can do it better and contribute to cumulating sociological knowledge, and 3) we want to stay together as a section for more section money, sessions, the quality and reach of our journal *Sociological Theory*, or for other reasons?

I end this essay with one suggestion, knowing full well that there is a great deal more to say. Of course we need to respectfully agree to disagree and then to get on with what we do to grow sociological knowledge within our particular theoretical culture. But we also need to encourage a subset of theorists to consciously operate as translators and cross-fertilizers from one theoretical culture to another. This would render what is actually done—as opposed to straw person impressions of what is done—mutually intelligible across cultures. Such mutual intelligibility would minimize the chances of counterproductive diatribes and organizational splits, while maximizing our chances for real cross cultural dialogue within the

Theory Section and in sociology more broadly. This in turn should mean more and better growth both of specific sociological theories and of sociological theory in general.

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Theory Section Activities in Montreal, in chronological order:

1. This year, we get to party first and work later. Our first activity is the **Theory Section Joint reception with the Section on Comparative and Historical Sociology and the Section on Emotions**, Friday, August 11, 6:30-8:15 p.m. Palais des Congrès.

2. **Theory Section Mini-Conference: Theories on Process: Theorists in Progress, Panel 1: The Production of Self**, Saturday, August 12, 8:30-10:10, Palais des Congrès.

Organizer: Robin Stryker
Moderator: Robin Stryker

Panelist: Peter J. Burke, University of California, Riverside
Panelist: Gary Alan Fine, Northwestern University
Panelist: Dawn T. Robinson, University of Georgia
Panelist: Sheldon Stryker, Indiana University

In this informal panel session, theorists from different cohorts and with different perspectives on self and identity will respond to moderator questions focused around the relationship between the theorists' life experiences and trajectories and the content of their theory building and research.

3. **Theory Section Open Roundtables**, Saturday, August 12, 12:30-1:10, Palais des Congrès. [Following our tradition, the Theory Section also will have its Council meeting at this time]

Roundtable Organizer: Joseph Gerteis, University of Minnesota

Participants:
Sophia Krzys Acord, University of Exeter
"Beyond the "Tacit" Cultural Code:
Interrogating the Aesthetic Experience in Contemporary Curatorial Practice"

Roberta Villalon, University of Texas, August "Dysfunctional Colonization: Habermas, Merton and Argentina's Recent Crisis."

Blane DaSilva, University of South Carolina, "Modeling Power: Connection Types in Network Exchange Research."

Leon H. Warshay, Wayne State University, "Reductionism versus Emergent Properties in Sociology and the Natural Sciences: An Empirical Study."

7. **The Theory Section Business Meeting is on Saturday, August 12, 1:30-2:10 p.m.** Palais des Congrès.

Old-timers and newcomers alike, please attend! By Theory Section by-laws and tradition, many of the Section's key committees for the year are voted or appointed at this time. Volunteers encouraged! Plus, the ASA tallies attendance at business meetings for an important indicator of section viability.

8. **Theory Section Book Panel: The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and its Methodological Others**, edited by **George Steinmetz**. Saturday, August 12, 10:30-12:10, Palais des Congrès.

Session Organizers: Julia Adams, Yale University and George Steinmetz, University of Michigan

Session President: Marcel Fournier, Université de Montréal

Critic: Axel P. Van Den Berg, McGill University

Critic: Allan Megill, University of Virginia

Critic: Yuval Peretz Yonay, University of Haifa

Critic: Chandra Mukerji, University of California-Davis

9. **Coser Award Lecture and Salon**. Saturday, August 12, 2:30-4:10. **Coser Award Winner is Margaret Somers, University of Michigan**. Palais des Congrès.

Session Organizer: Robin Stryker, University of Minnesota

Session Presider: Andrew J. Perrin, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Panelist: Coser Award Winner, Margaret R. Somers, University of Michigan.

The first half of the session will be devoted to a formal lecture delivered by Peggy, who is the first winner of the newly established Coser Award. During the second half of the session, Peggy will preside over an informal “salon discussion” among those in attendance. Food and drink will be available to accompany the salon in honor of Peggy and the launch of the Coser Award.

**Theory Section Mini-Conference:
Theories on Process; Theorists in
Progress, Panel 2: Inequality Processes,
Sunday, August 13, 10:30-12:10, Palais des
Congrès.**

Session Organizer: Robin Stryker, University of Minnesota

Session Moderator: Robin Stryker, University of Minnesota

Panelist: Douglas Hartmann, University of Minnesota

Panelist: Michele Lamont, Harvard University

Panelist: Cecilia Ridgeway, Stanford University

Panelist: Erik Olin Wright, University of Wisconsin

In this informal panel session, theorists of race, class and/or gender and other inequality process will respond to moderator questions about the relationship between the theorists’ diverse life trajectories and experiences and the content of their theory building and research.

**Theory Section Mini-Conference:
Theories on Process; Theorists in
Progress, Panel 3: Social Change, Sunday,
August 13, 12:30-2:10, Palais des Congrès.**

Session Organizer: Robin Stryker, University of Minnesota

Session Moderator: Robin Stryker, University of Minnesota

Panelist: Mounira Maya Charrad, University of Texas, Austin

Panelist: Jack Goldstone, George Mason University

Panelist: Kim Lane Scheppele, Princeton University

Panelist: Henry Walker, University of Arizona

In this informal panel session, theorists with diverse backgrounds who have developed different approaches to understanding and explaining social change will respond to moderator questions focused around the relationship between their life trajectories and the content of their theory building and research.

Review of *Disobedient Generation: Social Theorists in the Sixties* (Thanks to Julian Go for agreeing to write this – Ed.)

Alan Sica and Stephen Turner (editors)
University of Chicago Press 2005

Julian Go
Boston University

Disobedient Generation: Social Theorists in the Sixties is a fascinating read, partly because it contents belies its title. It is written by “social theorists,” but there is little by way of explicit theory in it. The authors came of age “in the sixties,” but the events of the sixties only surface intermittently. The authors are presumably of the same cohort, but the varied experiences, insights, and conclusions of the chapters betray an easily recognizable cohort effect. More radical critics might even wonder whether the contributors – many of whom went to elite American universities and are now part of the mainstream sociological establishment – were ever so “disobedient” in the first place. In short, the book should not be judged by its cover. It is different from what its title suggests. Yet it is also much more.

As a comparative-historical sociologist with a deep interest in theory, I first probed the chapters for insights into possible relationships between the events of the sixties and the authors’ respective theorizing. Did the eventful twists and turns of that turbulent decade impact Andrew Abbott’s theorizing on narrative positivism or fractals, for example? While Abbott’s discussion about the unpredictability of the Vietnam War draft is suggestive, he himself does not make such connections explicit. Neither do many of the other contributors. Most of them are only slightly more explicit on the connections. Patricia Hill Collins’ chapter offers an insightful discussion of how the civil rights movement and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. shaped her theoretical work; Bryan Turner connects May ’68 with his theorizing on bodily practice; Erik Olin Wright contextualizes his Marxism within the context of Berkeley’s radicalism. But for the most part, the impact of the sixties upon the authors’ theoretical work is elusive.

If readers chance upon connections (or even if they deliberately mine for them), they will most likely find that the connections lie between theory

and the events of the sixties *sui generis*. Saskia Sassen’s chapter is indicative. Her biography is remarkable for its cosmopolitan character: born of Dutch ancestry in South America, moved to Paris when still young, then to South Bend, back to France, and New York (not to mention jaunts through Colombia). With this background, Sassen’s theorizing on transnationalism and globalization might come as little surprise. But this has less to do with the global events of the sixties than with the idiosyncrasies of Sassen’s individual trajectory. The same might be said of Craig Calhoun’s chapter. If the “cultural turn” across the social sciences was partly rooted in the cultural politics (and political disappointments) of the sixties, one senses from Calhoun’s chapter that his interest in culture was born of the simple fact that he majored in anthropology and later studied in Manchester under Gluckmann rather than the fact that he was of the sixties generation.

Were there not common events and experiences imparted by “the sixties” that transcend the individual narratives? The Vietnam war and the civil rights movements are discussed in most of the chapters but not all of them. Even then, only less than half of the chapters do more than register passing references to them. The burgeoning women’s movement merits some attention in the chapters but comparably little. (Does this have to do with the fact that four of the nineteen contributors are women?). Protests and marches are noted in nearly all of the chapters, but only some of the contributors (e.g. Lauren Thevenot and Bryan Turner) suggest that social protest was critical for their subsequent thinking. The others treat protest as comparably insignificant for their life trajectories, as if marching was as routinized then as it is now to some of our undergraduates. The race riots and assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X are only mentioned by a few of the contributors. The rapid decolonization of Africa is barely noted; the exceptions, unsurprisingly, are from the European-based contributors. What about experimentation with illicit chemicals, “free love,” and other practices libidinal and counter-cultural? Much to this reader’s disappointment, such practices are absent from the majority of the chapters. Bryan Turner confesses that the sexual revolution “always appeared somewhere else” to him. By their silences

on the matter, one wonders if this might be the view of the other contributors as well.

Maybe this disconnect between the sixties and the authors' scholarship will be surprising only to those of us who were born after the sixties and who therefore have nostalgia about times we never experienced. In any case, it is not the impact of the sixties upon a generation that makes this book most illuminating. It is rather the diversity, particularity, and highly personalized biographies of the contributions. On one level there are delightful revelations of intimate details. How many of us younger sociologists knew that Karina Knorr-Cetina donned all black for her wedding? That Saskia Sassen's dissertation was rejected and at one point she was a sound poet? That Craig Calhoun played in a rock band? That Patricia Hill Collins, while still an undergraduate, helped write educational materials on Martin Luther King, Jr. for public school children? That Stephen Turner had a "substantial collection of Red Foxx and Pigmeat Markham comedy records and had the routines committed to memory"? Steve Woolgar confesses a hesitation in writing his chapter: "Who on earth could be remotely interested in my personal biography?" But it is exactly such personal biography that makes all of the chapters so compelling.

Besides these personal details, there are also new illuminations of otherwise unnoticeable connections between the contributors' individual experiences and their sociological interests. Beyond Sassen and Calhoun, Hans Joas explains that his interest in pragmatism was partly born from growing up in a "Catholic milieu as the son of a Nazi father and Social Democratic mother." From Michael Burawoy's chapter, we find that it was not the sixties that fueled his Marxism but his father's Marxian affiliations and Burawoy's own early experiences in Zambian coalmines. We also find that his emboldened stance against things mainstream sociology might have been grounded as much in his experience at the University of Chicago as it has been in ideological principle. "One becomes a Marxist." Burawoy states, "in part through the damnation of others" (one of those whom Burawoy apparently damns is Edward Shils, whose less-than-flattering recommendation letter for Burawoy opens the chapter). And as a whole, there is the simple pleasure of reading theorists' writings in a

refreshingly reflexive and relaxed prose. Were not more works of sociologists written in this way.

Ultimately, then, there is not much "theory" in the book as a whole. And the book contains few insights on how the sixties impacted this group of theorists. If this book is about a generation from the sixties, it remains unclear from the diverse array of the chapters and the stories they spin whether "the sixties" was ever so monolithic. It is a truism to say that our theoretical categories are dependent upon the larger sociohistorical contexts of their genesis. But, as the chapters in this book suggest, it is often difficult to pinpoint exactly what that larger sociohistorical context might be – outside, that is, the individuals' particular mediations of and on it. This is the book's productive tension. It is also what makes this book such a distinct pleasure to read.

W.E.B. Du Bois's Position in Sociological Theory

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No matter how fundamental his contributions to sociology, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963) remains outside, an 'outcast' or 'peripheral figure', of the sociological tradition---underrated by most early sociologists and many contemporary practitioners of the discipline.¹ Du Bois represents the paradoxical figure of the 'stranger' [Simmel], 'marginal man' [Park], and 'seventh son' [Du Bois] of the sociological tradition.¹ The negative consequence of this position/assignment is that Du Bois's sociological work continues to experience estrangement, marginalization, and stigmatization from 'the center'¹ of the sociological tradition. This de-centering does, however, have a positive side.¹ For according to Simmel, Park, and Du Bois, the stranger, marginal man, and seventh son play an important role as a social actor (and sociological theorist I would argue) because of their unique, advantageous position of being in or between two social worlds. This positioning allows for a bifurcated and balanced sociological perspective of society and human relations and heightened ability to better understand differences among social groups and explain social structural and organizational

divisions in society---power relations---according to race, class, gender, religion, culture, status and other human social groupings.

The ‘outsider’, ‘distanced’, ‘veiled’ viewpoint of the stranger, marginal man, and seventh son yields special insight about the social world, especially with regard to power, contact, and exchange among different social groups in society. These ‘peripheral’ perspectives and counter-narratives serve as foundations for non-traditional socio-theoretical concepts and advanced de-centered/de-centering sociological theories, which challenge *monologism*, *one-dimensionality*, *canonization*, and *elitism* in sociological theory.¹ With a large, increasingly complex network of de-centered/ing sociological theorists continually emerging, generating new intellectual traditions that theorize the social (cultural studies, post-Colonialism, post-modernism, post-structuralism, multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, and myriad forms of ‘subaltern’ studies), the realm of de-centered/ing sociological theory needs to take account of and support the numerous perspectives outside the center, but, nevertheless, should be broken down into three primary theoretical interests: race, class, and gender theory, theories that address the most basic structural divisions, organizational make-up, and relations of power in societies.

Identifying the central race, class, and gender theorists who have developed prototypical oppositional analyses is a necessary project already begun, but only a third of the way completed. Today, Marx stands alone as the grand theorist of class and his critique of capitalism and dialectics of historical materialism serve as theoretical starting points of class analysis for most sociological theorists, both close to and distant from the center.¹ In contrast to Marx’s ascendancy and preeminence as a class theorist and the establishment of Marxist doctrine in class theory (and movement toward the center), the grand theorists of race and gender have not yet been crowned, and, correspondingly, the ‘grand’ theories and concepts of race and gender have not yet been systematically outlined. Unlike the more developed class-based theories of Marxism, race-based and gender-based sociological theories remain for the most part ineffectual and poorly situated (de-centered) as sociological theories.¹ This condition is, in part, due to the absence of a pivotal

race and gender theorist or theorists who provides/provide core sets of concepts and guiding theoretical principles (reference points) with which to agree or disagree, but also because class relations are closer to the center than race or gender relations and because class-based theories are viewed to be more legitimate as sociological theories than race or gender-based theories (and are, in fact, used to explain gender and racial inequality).

My goal for the remainder of this essay is to delineate several of Du Bois’s key sociological concepts and critical socio-theoretical understandings that communicate the ways race shapes social reality---sociological theory necessary for comprehending the central role of race in human behavior and the social world, but sociological theory that is, nonetheless, routinely de-centered by the sociological tradition and other social science disciplines. Central to Du Bois’s sociological theory are: meanings of “race”, the concept “double consciousness”, the theory of “cultural pluralism”, and understandings of the “Veil” and the problem of the “color-line”.

Du Bois argued that race is a primary force, structuring mechanism, and construct shaping the social world that operates at both the local/national and global/international level.¹ For Du Bois, race is a complex, multi-dimensional subject that must be approached from different angles; he appears to have arranged analyses of race around four primary areas or divisions: social psychology and social philosophy of race; sociology of race; social history of race; and political and critical sociology of race. Du Bois’s first concern was to develop theories and concepts of race (in part, to contest Social Darwinism’s strong influence in sociological theory) and to explain how subjective experiences of race, racial ideas, attitudes, and behaviors construct the social world. Secondly, he was concerned with explicating race relations, describing how perceptions and social constructions of race organize human relations and structure society into different race groups. Two other interrelated areas of concern in Du Bois’s theoretical labyrinth and analyses of race focus on: 1) properly defining the micro and macro nature of racism---both the psychological racism (racial prejudice and its affects) that fundamentally shapes human beings’ thought and actions, and the more lethal, embedded structural

racism (racial oppression, segregation, and persecution and their effects) operating in institutions, communities and the everyday world of society; and 2) critiquing and combating racism in all its manifestations: ideational, intellectual, social, psychological, economic, political, cultural, historical...etc.

Du Bois's sociological thought, specifically his theories concerning the ways race constructs social reality, was rooted in his experience: graduate education in philosophy, history and the social sciences at the best schools in the U.S. and Europe (Harvard College and the University of Berlin); travel throughout America and Europe; his years as an empirical sociologist and founding father of American sociology (1896-1914), during which he conducted the first noted sociological studies examining the experiences and social lives of different segments of the black American community (*The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*; "The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study;" and *The Atlanta University Publications*); study and writings in history (*The Suppression of the African Slave Trade*; *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880*; and, *The World and Africa*); time and energy spent working for the NAACP, including the extended task of editing the organization's journal, *The Crisis*, from 1910-1934; and, the act of composing and then delivering countless speeches, lectures, addresses, letters and other communications throughout his life-long career battling misunderstandings and injustices surrounding race (*W.E.B. Du Bois Speaks: Speeches and Addresses, Vols. I, II*; *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois, Vols. I, II, III*; and *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses of W.E.B. Du Bois, 1887-1961*). Using his personal and professional knowledge and experiences of race and the social world, Du Bois was able to construct several guiding sociological concepts and theoretical perspectives about race and its influence on contemporary social life that are as powerful and timely as when they were written (which underscores just how little progress has been made in understanding the role of race in society).

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois introduced the idea of "double consciousness", a concept and mode of being (Horkheimer's "dualism of thought and being") at the base of his

understandings and experiences of the world. Du Bois viewed double consciousness as a primary conceptual model for describing the psycho-social divisions affecting the consciousness of individuals and collective identity of groups who are, despite their citizenship, incorporation, and value, largely excluded from the heart of society, relegated to its margins, to a de-centered, disadvantageous social position and social world outside the dominant culture, mainstream social networks, and privileged 'majority' of the society, and thus forced to live in and navigate between two worlds: the center and margins of society. While initially intended to describe the psychological tensions and split consciousness---the "two-ness"---of black/African Americans (at both the individual and group-level) who face a white world and black world [Dennis] and who experience both an "African" and "American" self or group identity [Bell], double consciousness is equally useful as a theoretical model for understanding the psycho-social tension and conflicting psychological and social reality/condition of any de-centered individual or group forced into two social worlds and a dual existence as insider and outsider.¹

Responding to the theoretical deficiencies of the integrationists and separatists, assimilationists and nationalists,¹ Du Bois proposed a 'qualified' theory of cultural pluralism in "The Conservation of the Races" (1897), a theory of race/group relations that neither adheres to complete integration or assimilation of different races/groups, nor complete separation or nationalism of the different races/groups. Ideally, cultural pluralism can serve as a more democratic (egalitarian) and more linear (non-hierarchical) model for how different groups might socially co-exist, interact, and respect one another's group differences. According to Du Bois, for cultural pluralism to operate successfully, just, equalized inter-group contacts and conscious, mutually beneficial interactions among different groups must be forged, and an honest, non-abusive approach to the 'separate but equal' logic needs to be realized and materialize, one that would allow for a fair and open field of inter-group exchange, offering the *same* social, economic, and political opportunities for all groups in society.

Because he lived in a racially stratified society and world,¹ Du Bois found ideas of a

common American culture and universal humanity (the belief in 'one America' and a single 'human race') to be mythical or, at best, hypocritically unrealized. According to Du Bois, the modern social world is divided according to the "color-line" (the line drawn between the white and non-white worlds) and different races are kept separated by the "Veil" (Du Bois's metaphor for the racist divide and divisiveness of racism). Du Bois's most controversial as well as most illuminating approach to sociological theory, found scattered throughout most his work, focused on describing, critiquing, and fighting the power and effects of 'racism', a societal belief system and ubiquitous structuring force/forceful structure that adversely and unjustly impacts the social ordering, organization, and 'structuration' of individuals and groups in society. While remaining surprisingly neutral and objective in his critique of racism considering he was an oppressed black American and 'downtrodden member of the Negro race', Du Bois's writings present critical, but fair documentation of white privilege, whites' oppression of blacks, and other contours of the white-on-black racism in American society and abroad; furthermore, Du Bois's writings posit the prophetic claim that the most pressing social problems of future humankind will result, in large part, from the perpetuation of the "color bar", the continued unequal division of the darker and lighter-skinned groups of people throughout the world.

Greater exposure to his work would leave no doubt that Du Bois ought to be viewed as a (if not the) principle architect of a race-based sociological theory. By laboriously and systematically investigating and illuminating the meaning of race, social divisions based on race, the nature of racism, and their interrelation in the production and reproduction of a racially classified, racially structured, and racist operating social world, Du Bois initiated construction of a critical race-based theory of society and race-based approach to sociological theory that present serious challenges to those at the center of the sociological tradition and society who continue to de-center the socio-theoretical importance of race. Becoming acquainted with W.E.B. Du Bois's sociological thought might not be a matter of intellectual choice much longer, for racial conflict increasingly defines

U.S. society and much of the world, and this conflict, like all historical conflicts among human groups, is reaching a boiling point which future sociological theorists will be forced to contend.

Notes

1) Du Bois's exclusion from the early academic discipline of sociology is critically noted. See Elijah Anderson (1996), Benjamin Bowser (2002), Dan Green and Edwin Driver (1978), Sean Elias (2005), Elliott Rudwick (1974), and Charles Smith and Lewis Killian (1974).

Steven Brint and James Lavalley's (2000) and Phil Zuckerman's (2004) findings indicate that, although he still remains largely unrecognized in the tradition, more sociologists are beginning to incorporate Du Bois.

2) Despite distinctions among the concepts, Georg Simmel's *stranger* (1908), Robert Park's *marginal man* (1937), and William Du Bois's *seventh son* (1903)---an individual/group (black Americans were Du Bois's focus) who experiences double consciousness and a dual social environment---all signify an individual/group fundamentally excluded from or not fully integrated into society, existing both inside (the center) or outside (the margins) the society.

3) Building on ideas of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Edward Shils, and Georg Simmel, I define the 'center' as the site where power and resources are controlled and concentrated and which is accessible only to certain individuals/groups---the superordinate, dominant, oppressor, ruler, or privileged class of individuals and groups.

4) Simmel wrote that "to be a stranger is naturally a very positive relation". Simmel's stranger benefits from being "fixed within" a group, yet not fully belonging to the group. According to Park, the marginal man possesses an advantage of having knowledge of more than one social world or culture---from having a variety of viewpoints. Park proclaims that the marginal man is "the individual with the wider horizon, the keener intelligence, the more detached and rational viewpoint." Similarly Du Bois notes that the seventh son is "gifted with

second-sight” of social reality that apprehends and bridges two social groups/traditions/worlds.

5) See James Blackwell’s critique of *elitism* (1974), Fuyuki Kurasawa’s critique of *one-dimensionality* (2004), David Sibley’s critique of *canonization* (1995), and Dorothy Smith’s critique of *monologism* (1999) in sociological theory. Each theorist attacks the center in different ways; for example: whereas Kurasawa examines how certain ideas/subjects of the major thinkers in the sociological tradition (Durkhiem, Marx, and Weber) are de-centered and others are uni-dimensionalized, Smith explores how the monologism of these grand theorists of the tradition de-center certain ideas and subjects, thus inhibiting dialogue/*dialogism* and multi-dimensionality in sociological theory.

6) Paradoxically, while Marx is considered a central figure of the canon, Marxist sociological thought and practice, in its true radical and revolutionary form, is highly de-centered and foreign to the discourse of most of today’s sociological theorists.

7) I do not mean to say that race and gender-based theoretical scholarship is weak, just fragmented. For example, the leading gender-based theorists, feminist theorists like Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Catherine MacKinnon, and Dorothy Smith, each have different approaches to feminist critique, providing distinct and, at time, conflicting gender-based theories.

8) See Lucius Outlaw’s writings (1996) that address the powerful effects of race on Du Bois’ social thought.

9) See Rutledge Dennis’s (2003 [1996]) sociological and Bernard Bell’s (1996) psychological treatment of the Du Boisian double consciousness theme. Importantly, Dennis notes that ‘Du Bois’s original logic for double consciousness was indeed sociologically grounded,’ since Du Bois realized that double consciousness of the individual/group is occasioned by the existence of two social worlds or ‘dual environment’. Dennis (2003) argues that understandings of a ‘double environment’ discussed in Du Bois’s *Dusk of Dawn* (and earlier outlined in *The Philadelphia Negro*, I

would argue), produce a ‘sociologically suggestive’ development or complimentary concept of double consciousness that might ultimately lead to a theory of ‘dual marginality’, a concept that explores the properties and effects of two opposing social worlds.

10) Du Bois’s approach to race relations offered a critical response to the ultra-nationalist social philosophy of Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington’s ‘accomodationism’, the ‘assimilationist’ stance of early American sociologists like Robert E. Park, and segregationist ideologies and practices of ‘Jim Crow’ America. It should be noted that because he viewed cultural pluralism to be presently unattainable, Du Bois advocated developing and occasionally mixing Pan-Africanism (Marable), socialism (Aptheker), and, when necessary, economic separatism (Dennis, 1996).

11) Contemporary scholarship in the social sciences supports Du Bois’s observations about the color-line and divisions and conflict created by racism. See (Brown, 2003); (Feagin, 2000; 2006); (Feagin and Vera, 1995); (Hacker, 1992); (Massey and Denton, 1993); and (Stone, 1985).

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