

Appendix 1: Theoretical Frameworks

Erving Goffman's Stigma

In his book, "*Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity*", Erving Goffman states that stigma is an "attribute that is deeply discrediting, but it should be seen that a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed". Goffman's emphasis on a language of relationships is an important component of the definition of stigma that is often overlooked when his conceptual framework is applied. Thus, rather than being a static 'thing', stigma is a social process, wherein language and imagery are deployed to generate categories of people, some of whom become discredited or discreditable because they possess a trait classified as being undesirable, or which exists in contradistinction to an existing 'norm'. Because stigmatization can lead to status loss and spread from the affected individuals to their close connections, individuals who are stigmatized and discreditable typically engage in strategies of information control so that they can 'pass' as 'normal', a category which Goffman problematizes in the concluding sections of his book.

Pierre Bourdieu's 'Structural-Constructivism'

Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework of 'structural-constructivism' integrates and overcomes what he considered an artificial and ruinous opposition between the 'objectivist' and 'subjectivist' approaches to understanding the social world. For Bourdieu, objectivist approaches to science are characterized by analyses that seek to explain social reality as the sum of objective structures and relations that exist independently of human interaction and interpretation. In contrast, the subjectivist mode of inquiry asserts that social reality is constructed through interactions between individuals, and understood through interpretation.

According to Bourdieu, objectivist and subjectivist positions exist in a dialectical relationship and both moments are necessary to understand human experience and action. That is, while social reality may be produced by interaction, it is done so within the constraints of objective social structures, relations and discourses that are themselves socially produced. Thus, from a Bourdieusian perspective, research examining human experience must consider the social constitution of individuals and the social environments they must navigate as well as the conditions in which they interact with one another. To do this, Bourdieu has developed a theoretical arsenal composed of three inter-connected concepts: habitus, field and capital.

Habitus

The habitus is a set of unconscious dispositions or “common sense understandings” which reflects the social position of the individual and the regular conditions to which an individual is accustomed and at ease. These dispositions are acquired through lasting exposure to particular social conditions and conditionings and through the internalization of dominant social structures that place constraints on behaviours, attitudes, tastes and body comportment. Although the habitus can be modified through the acquisition of new dispositions, early childhood socialization experiences are particularly important. Therefore, the habitus is structured, in that the incorporated dispositions reflect the social conditions within which they were acquired, and structuring, in that it orients individual actions, beliefs, expectations, tendencies and inclinations without strictly determining them. Individuals who are subjected to similar conditions may share a common set of dispositions, or a ‘group habitus’, explaining, for instance, why individuals of the same nationality or gender may feel ‘at home’ with one another. In other words, habitus provides a way to conceptualize how individuals carry within them their history and how this history is imported into and across varied social contexts. It is, as Bourdieu states, the “social embodied”.

Field and Capital

Fields are structured spaces of positions, social contexts or symbolic institutions with their own sets of rules and hierarchies of relationships. Examples of fields include the health care system, families and academia. Positions within the hierarchy of a particular field are determined largely by the composition and volume of capital possessed by an individual entering that field. For Bourdieu, capital is any resource that is effective in a given social field that enables an individual to improve their position or benefit from their participation within the field. Bourdieu distinguishes between four principal forms of capital, including economic, social, symbolic and cultural. Social capital is accumulated through membership in or access to a particular group or network. Symbolic capital manifests in the form of prestige and reputation. However, symbolic capital can also be deployed in a reverse manner wherein groups of individuals are negatively labeled and judged (e.g. racism).

Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field and capital are linked, in that it is the relationship among the three that is pivotal for understanding practice and experience.