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# A

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## accounts

The term account – along with the related terms accountable and accountability – is a term of art largely associated with **ethnomethodology**. However, it has come into wider usage as various broadly ethnomethodological insights and sensibilities have drifted into mainstream sociology. Following Marvin Scott's and Stanford Lyman's article "Accounts" (1968) in the *American Sociological Review*, some users of the term have dwelt primarily on accounts as linguistic devices used to neutralize the disapproval caused by seemingly untoward behavior. Thus, the term has been distinguished as a particular subset of the category **explanation**. According to this line of argument, accounts may be divided into two sub-types: excuses and justifications. The first device acknowledges an act to have been "bad, wrong, or inappropriate" but denies the apparently culpable party is fully responsible for what has occurred. The second device denies the act was bad, wrong, or inappropriate in the first place. Insofar as these devices rely for their efficacy on invoking what **C. Wright Mills** once called certain shared "vocabularies of motive" (1940) in the *American Journal of Sociology*, they may be used as empirical windows on the wider world of moral sensibilities shared by a studied social **group**.

Ethnomethodologists use the terms accounts, accountable, and accountability in a rather more inclusive and fundamental way. Indeed, they argue that it is only by virtue of its accountability that any kind of collaborative **social action** is at all possible. In its specifically ethnomethodological sense, the accountability of social action is more than just a matter of linguistically excusing or justifying untoward conduct. It entails exhibiting and coordinating the orderliness and reasonability of social action in the widest sense. Hence, the terms account, accountable, and accountability are used to capture various constituent features of social action as such. Social action is accountable in this sense to the extent that its witnesses find it non-random, coherent, meaningful, and oriented to the accomplishment of practical goals.

Moreover, for ethnomethodologists, the accountability of social action is much more than just a theoretical matter or one of disinterested interpretation. As social actors, we are not just accountable to one another in the sense that we can linguistically describe each other's actions. Rather, the very fact that social action is describable in this way, or that it can be accounted for, is linked to another sense of its accountability. As social actors, we are also accountable in the sense that we may be held to account if our behavior fails to exhibit orderliness and reasonability to those with whom we find ourselves engaged. Social actors need not linguistically describe conduct in order to find it accountable in these senses.

Ethnomethodologists also stress that sociologists can make use of the fact that social action is manifestly accountable to social actors themselves as a resource for making sociological sense of what is going on in social action. In principle, all of the various linguistic and non-linguistic devices through which social actors make their actions accountable to one another should also be recoverable for use as resources in the empirical sociological analysis of their actions.

DARIN WEINBERG

## act

– see **action theory**.

## action research

– see **action theory**.

## action theory

"Did he jump or was he pushed?" Jumping is an action. Being pushed is an event. Action theory is an approach to the study of social life that is based on the ontological premise that people jump. For example, the flow of traffic on a busy street differs from the flow of electrons on a copper wire. Electrons are pushed, drivers are not. From a structural perspective, we can learn a great deal about the flow of traffic by focusing on exogenous determinants, without ever knowing much about what drives human behavior. While few action theorists

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would disagree with the value of structural analysis, they also see the need to look beyond the constraints on action, to the intentions, purposes, and goals that motivate efforts to push back.

Action theory has roots in **Max Weber**'s interpretative method and in **Talcott Parsons**'s effort to integrate this with **Émile Durkheim**'s macro-social approach. In "The Place of Ultimate Values in Sociological Theory," Parsons insisted that "man is essentially an active, creative, evaluating creature" whose behavior must be understood in terms of the ends of action, and not "in terms of 'causes' and 'conditions'" (1935). His "voluntaristic theory of action" opposed the deterministic account of human behavior as "pushed," whether by **Sigmund Freud**'s "unconscious" or Pavlov's bell.

Action theory informs a diverse range of contemporary sociological theorizing, including rational action, **symbolic interactionism**, conflict theory, and **hermeneutics**. Conceptually, there are two main branches – one based on interests, the other on identity. Rational-action theory posits instrumental pursuit of self-interest, which can include an interest in public as well as private goods and an interest in social approval and avoidance of sanctions. Using mathematical formalism, the theory can generate testable predictions from a relatively small number of assumptions. However, the scope of the theory is limited by heroic assumptions about perfect information and unlimited calculating ability. Even versions based on "bounded rationality" are limited to actions intended to maximize utility, which excludes expressive and enthusiastic behavior and actions motivated by normative obligation and moral righteousness.

That void has been addressed by theories of action based on identity rather than interest. For identity theorists, "interests are only the surface of things. What is beneath the surface is a strong emotion, a feeling of a group of people that they are alike and belong together," according to Randall Collins in *Sociological Insight* (1992: 28). Individuals order the social world by carving out cognitive categories through interaction with others, leading to stereotyping, in-group favoritism, and out-group **prejudice**. Social and moral boundaries are defined and affirmed by punishing deviants. Punishment is not calibrated to deter **deviance**; rather, it is unleashed as an expression of indignation at the violation of normative boundaries, even when this may excite opposition rather than suppress it.

Interest and identity theories of action both emphasize the dynamics of interaction among

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autonomous but interdependent agents. However, they differ in how this interdependence is understood. Interest theory posits *strategic* interdependence, in which the consequences of individual choices depend in part on the choices of others. Game theorists (see **game theory**) model this interdependence as a payoff matrix defined by the intersection of all possible choices of the players, with individual payoffs assigned to each cell. For example, the payoff for providing favors depends on whether the partner reciprocates. Peer pressure is also an example of strategic interdependence created by the application of sanctions conditional upon compliance with expected behavior.

Identity theorists point instead to the *cognitive* interdependence of agents who influence one another in response to the influences they receive, through processes like communication, persuasion, instruction, and imitation. Action theory poses three related and perplexing puzzles: the problem of social order, the tension between structure and action, and the problem of free will and determinism. Contemporary research on complex dynamical systems has enriched action theory by providing plausible solutions to each of these puzzles, based, in turn, on the principles of self-organization, emergence, and deterministic chaos.

Macrosocial theories of social order posit a structured system of institutions and norms that shape individual behavior from the top down. In contrast, action theories assume that much of social life emerges from the bottom up, more like improvisational jazz than a symphony orchestra. People do not simply play roles written by elites and directed by managers. We each chart our own course, on the fly. How then is social order possible? If every musician is free to play as they choose, why do we not end up with a nasty and brutish cacophony, a noisy war of all against all?

Parsons addressed the "Hobbesian problem of order" by positing a set of shared **norms** and **values** that secure the cultural consensus necessary for social systems to function. Yet this is not a satisfactory solution. In effect, society remains a symphony orchestra in which the musicians must still learn their parts, except that now the Leviathan needs to carry only a thin baton, and not a lethal weapon.

An alternative solution was anticipated by Parsons's student, **Niklas Luhmann**. Luhmann bridged the gap between action theory and systems theory by placing individual actors in a web of communicative interaction with others. His rather abstruse ideas on autopoietic systems of interaction find clearer expression in **complexity theory**. The

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emergence of order out of local interaction in complex systems has come to be known as “self-organization” according to S. Kaufman in *Origins of Order* (1993). The archetype is biological evolution, but there are parallels across the sciences, cases in which surprising (and often quite exquisite) global patterns emerge from interactions among relatively simple but interdependent processes, in the absence of central coordination, direction, or planning. These include flocks of birds, traffic jams, fads, forest fires, riots, and residential segregation. There is no leader bird who choreographs the dance-like movement of a flock of geese. There is no supervisor in charge of a riot. There is no conspiracy of banks and realtors who are assigning people to ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods. These processes are examples of complex systems in which global order emerges spontaneously out of a web of local interactions among large numbers of autonomous yet interdependent agents. Emergence is a defining feature of complex systems and is ultimately responsible for the self-organization we find beneath the apparent chaos of nature (Coveney and Highfield, *Frontiers of Complexity*, 1995).

Emergent properties are not reducible to the properties of the individual agents. The idea of emergence was anticipated by one of the founders of sociology, who established this as a fundamental rule of the sociological method. “The hardness of bronze is not in the copper, the tin, or the lead, which are its ingredients and which are soft and malleable bodies,” Émile Durkheim wrote in *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, “it is in their mixture.” “Let us apply this principle to sociology,” he continued; “[Social facts] reside exclusively in the very society itself which produces them, and not in its parts, i.e., its members” (1986: xlvi).

Structuralists have reified Durkheim’s theory of social facts as emergent properties, leaving individual actors as little more than the incumbents of social locations and the carriers of structural imperatives. Heterogeneity in preferences and beliefs affects only which individuals will fill which “empty slots,” the origin of which lies in processes that operate at the societal level.

In *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), Parsons also argued for the emergent properties of social systems, but believed Durkheim went too far in concluding that these “social facts” are entirely independent of individual consciousness. Parsons corrects the hyperstructuralist interpretation of Durkheim by incorporating an essential insight of Joseph Schumpeter’s “methodological individualism,” the idea that societal patterns emerge

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from motivated choices and not from social facts external to individuals. Methodological individualism can be taken to imply that social facts are but the aggregated expression of individual goals and intentions. For example, residential segregation reflects the preferences of individuals for living among people similar to themselves. In contrast, structuralists assume that individual differences in ethnic identity affect who will live where in segregated neighborhoods but are not the cause of neighborhood segregation, which emanates from societal processes like red-lining and patterns of urban development.

Action theory is often most effective when it steers between these extremes. A classic example is Thomas Schelling’s model of neighborhood segregation in his “Dynamic Model of Segregation” in the *Journal of Mathematical Sociology* 1971 (1). Schelling challenged the macrosocial assumption that segregation is imposed from the top down, through institutional means like “red-lining.” At the same time, his famous experiment also challenged the microsocial assumption that segregation floats from the bottom up, through the aggregation of individual prejudices against ethnic minorities and outsiders. Schelling randomly distributed red and green chips on a large checkerboard and moved individual chips to empty locations if the number of in-group neighbors fell below an individual’s threshold of tolerance. He discovered that extreme segregation can emerge even in a population that tolerates diversity, as agents relocate to avoid being in the minority. This surprisingly strong tendency towards neighborhood segregation is an emergent property of the population, generated by local interactions among large numbers of interdependent but autonomous agents, even when every individual is tolerant of diversity.

Action theory explains social life by identifying the *reasons* for action (whether instrumental interests or symbolic meanings). As **Anthony Giddens** put it in *The Constitution of Society*, “I propose simply to declare that reasons are causes” (1984: 345). Yet most people now accept that everything in the universe is physically determined. How can this determinism be reconciled with a voluntaristic theory of action? Consider a sunbather who moves his/her towel to fend off a late afternoon shadow. Meanwhile, next to the towel, a heliotropic plant turns to follow the sun’s trajectory, thereby maximizing its access to an essential resource. Even the most dedicated Cartesian would not suggest that a sunflower is a purposive agent whose actions can be explained by the plant’s

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need for photosynthesis. How do we know that the sunbather is any different? One answer is that the sunbather could have chosen to remain in the shadow, while the sunflower could not. However, it is trivial to construct a stochastic sunflower that “chooses” to move, based on a probability distribution given by the location of the sun. A better answer is that the sunbather can tell you that the desire for sunlight is the *reason* for the action, while the sunflower will tell you nothing of the kind. Plants cannot provide reasons for their behavior, humans can. But does this mean that the sunbather is right? Is it possible that the sunbather, like the sunflower, is simply responding to physical stimuli that induce heliotropic movement, and, unlike for the sunflower, this movement is accompanied by the epiphenomenal feeling of choosing?

There is mounting evidence from neuroscientists and experimental psychologists that supports that possibility. In 1983, Benjamin Libet found that “cerebral neural activity (‘readiness potential’) precedes the subject’s awareness of his/her intention or wish to act by at least 350 msec” (“Commentary on ‘Free Will in the Light of Neuropsychiatry,’” 1996). More recently, in *The Illusion of Conscious Will* (2002), Daniel Wegner reported substantial evidence to support the hypothesis that “conscious will” is largely an illusion, useful to help us remember our authorship of actions whose causes lie elsewhere. These and other studies point to the possibility that our intentions are formed in the course of initiating action, but in a separate cognitive subsystem that assigns authorship after the fact. If so, then perhaps humans are unique in the ability to provide rational accounts for our actions, but we have no more free will than does a sunflower.

The theory of complex systems suggests an alternative possibility – that free will is compatible with determinism. Even relatively simple dynamical systems can require exponential amounts of computing power for every additional input into the system, until the number of bits required to predict system behavior, even in the near term, can exceed the number of particles in the universe. Thus, a highly nonlinear deterministic system like the brain can be indeterminable, which leaves open a window for intentional choice that is not reducible to system determinants (James P. Crutchfield, “Complexity: Order Contra Chaos,” 1989).

Meanwhile, a growing interest in complex adaptive systems has opened up action theory to “backward-looking” approaches in which intentionality is empirically variable rather than

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presupposed. In backward-looking models, the ends of action attract the behaviors that produce them, whether or not the agent intended the outcome or is even aware of its existence. From a forward-looking perspective, this idea appears hopelessly teleological since the ends of action are located in the future and cannot reach back through time to attract the choices needed to bring them about. Models of complex adaptive systems avoid this problem by pointing backward, not forward – attributing action to outcomes that have already occurred. In agent-based evolutionary models, outcomes of a given action alter the population distribution of agents who engage in that action. In learning models, outcomes of a given action alter the probability distribution of actions within the repertoire of any given agent. Either way, the link between action and outcome is a set of experiences, not intentions. Agents look forward by holding a mirror to the past. They jump when they are pushed. MICHAEL W. MACY

## actor network theory

Actor network theory (ANT) is a family of approaches to social analysis that rests on six core assumptions. First, it treats **institutions**, practices, and actors as materially heterogeneous, composed not only of people but also of technologies and other materials. Second, it assumes that the elements making up practices are *relational*, achieving their shape and attributes only in interaction with other elements. Nothing is intrinsically fixed or has reality outside the web of interactions. Third, it assumes that the network of heterogeneous relations and practices is a process. If structures, institutions, or realities are not continuously enacted then they disappear. Fourth, it therefore assumes that realities and structures are precarious in principle, if not in practice. Fifth, this implies that the world might be different, a suggestion that opens up interesting political possibilities. And sixth, it explores *how* rather than *why* realities are generated and maintained. This is because even the most obvious social causes are relational effects and therefore themselves subject to change.

ANT developed initially in the 1980s in Paris with the work of such authors as Michel Callon, **Bruno Latour** (*Science in Action*, 1987), and John Law (*Organizing Modernity*, 1994). It grew (and grows) through empirical studies of technologies, science practices, **organizations**, **markets**, health care, spatial practices, and the natural world. Indeed it is not possible to appreciate ANT without exploring such case studies. Philosophically, it owes

## adaptation

much to Michel Serres (1930–5) and is generally poststructuralist in inspiration. It thus shares with the writing of **Michel Foucault** an empirical concern with material-semiotic patterns of relations, though the patterns that it discerns are smaller in scope than those identified by Foucault.

The approach is controversial. First, since it is non-humanist it analytically privileges neither people nor the social, which sets it apart from much English-language sociology. Second, since it offers accounts of how rather than why institutions take shape, it is sometimes accused of explanatory weakness. Third, political critics have suggested that it is insensitive to the “invisible work” of low-status actors. Fourth, it has been accused in some of its earlier versions of a **bias** towards centering, ordering, or even managerialism. And fifth, feminists have observed that it has shown little sensitivity to embodiment (see **body**).

Whether these complaints are now justified is a matter for debate. Indeed, ANT is probably better seen as a toolkit and a set of methodological sensibilities rather than as a single theory. Recently there has been much interchange between ANT, feminist material-semiotics (**Donna J. Haraway**) and **postcolonial theory**, and there is newer “after-ANT” work that is much more sensitive to the politics of domination, to embodiment, to “othering,” and to the possible multiplicity and non-coherence of relations. A key issue remains politics. Such “after-ANT” writers as Annemarie Mol (*The Body Multiple*, 2002) and Helen Verran argue that relations are non-coherent and enact overlapping but different versions of reality, so there is space for “ontics,” or an “ontological politics” about what can and should be made real. This means that alternative and preferable realities might be enacted into being or made stronger: reality is not destiny.

JOHN LAW

## adaptation

– see **evolutionary theory**.

## addiction

In its original usage, addiction meant simply to be given over to someone or something. It was a term used widely to describe passionate investments in various sorts of activities, as can be seen in Shakespeare’s *Othello* where we read “Each man to what sport and revel his addiction leads him.” Well into the nineteenth century the concept of addiction was used to describe a diverse assortment of human fixations. But as Temperance movements grew in the mid nineteenth century, the term was increasingly considered as a medical or

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quasi-medical term of art and its scope was delimited to describing an individual’s seeming enslavement to alcohol or drugs. A multitude of efforts have been made to provide biological **explanations** for some people’s apparently pathological attachment to alcohol or drug use but each has met with rather serious conceptual obstacles. In response to these difficulties, most medical lexicons have now dispensed with the term addiction in favor of the presumably less conceptually troubling concept dependence. However, the term addiction continues to be found in both clinical and popular discourse regarding alcohol and drug problems and has indeed been extended to new forms of apparently compulsive behavior including over-eating, gambling, compulsive sexual behavior, and others.

In sociology, addiction has been approached from several distinct theoretical vantage points. Regrettably, the term has often been used interchangeably with other terms including deviant drug use, drug misuse, and drug abuse. Such imprecision results in a confusion of questions concerning the social approval of various sorts of alcohol or drug use with questions concerning whether this use is voluntary. Much of the history of **social policy** concerning alcohol and psychoactive drugs has been predicated, at least ostensibly, on the claim that these substances possess unusual powers over people and must be regulated to protect citizens from their own personal proclivities to succumb to addictive use. If we are not able to distinguish claims regarding the putative **morality** of alcohol or drug use from claims regarding people’s ability to control their use, we are poorly equipped to evaluate effectively the history of policies predicated on the notion that people need protection from putatively addictive substances. We are also poorly equipped to evaluate social research which either endorses or rejects this idea. If it is to have any meaning at all, the term addiction cannot be considered as synonymous with terms denoting voluntary substance use.

The earliest sociological research concerned specifically with addiction was conducted by Alfred Lindesmith under the tutelage of **Herbert Blumer** at the University of Chicago. Lindesmith noted that, whereas users who acquired heroin on the street were often vulnerable to addictive patterns of use, those who had been administered opiates in hospital settings were not so vulnerable. He explained this by suggesting that, whereas both hospital and street users experience physiological withdrawal symptoms upon cessation of use, only street users are consciously aware

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of the fact that the source of their distress lies in their heroin deprivation. Lindesmith argued that, by using drugs specifically to alleviate withdrawal, mere drug users were transformed into genuine drug addicts. This theory was attractive to sociologists in the twentieth century because it insisted the symbolic meanings actors found in their drug experiences were essential elements of the addiction process. While Lindesmith's theory remains the classic canonical benchmark for contemporary sociological theorizing on addiction, it has been subject to several rather serious critiques. Most fundamentally, his theory presumes that physiological withdrawal distress is a necessary prerequisite for the onset of addictive patterns of behavior. In the wake of the so-called crack cocaine "epidemic," theories of addiction predicated on the experience of physiological withdrawal distress have been undermined. Because they do not involve gross physiological withdrawal symptoms, crack cocaine addiction, along with nicotine addiction and behavioral addictions like those to eating, gambling, and sex, have cast doubt on the generalizability of Lindesmith's theory and have even put in question its validity with respect to opiates themselves.

During the mid twentieth century, structural functionalists offered a variety of theoretical accounts for apparently addictive behavior that departed in important ways from Lindesmith's seminal work. Seeking wholly social structural explanations, these theories shared in common a departure from Lindesmith's presumption of a necessary physiological component to addiction. In his famous essay "Social Structure and Anomie" (1938, *American Sociological Review*), **Robert K. Merton** suggested that chronic drunkards and drug addicts might exemplify the retreatist adaptation, one of his five modes of adjustment whereby social actors adopt ostensibly deviant patterns of action. According to Merton, the addict could be understood as an individual who believes in the propriety of both cultural goals and the institutionalized procedures society affords for achieving those goals but who cannot produce the desired results by socially sanctioned means. The result of this failure is a retreat from social life into "defeatism, quietism, and resignation." This proposition was developed by Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin in their book *Delinquency and Opportunity* (1960) in what became their fairly influential "Double Failure" hypothesis regarding addictive behavior. In contrast to Merton, Cloward and Ohlin suggested addicts were not opposed to adopting illegitimate means of achieving legitimate

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cultural goals, but rather were incapable of using even these means for securing social rewards. Hence, addicts were double failures in the sense that they failed to achieve by either legitimate or criminal procedures. Heavy drug use was held to alienate the putative addict from both mainstream and delinquent **subcultures**, thus further minimizing their opportunities for social success. Some structural functionalists moved beyond **explanations** of the distribution of addicts across social structural positions to consider the social psychological processes that motivated addictive patterns of alcohol or drug use. The best-known of these was normative ambivalence theory, according to which dysfunctional substance use will arise when agents are bombarded with competing normative orientations to their use. According to functionalists, apparently addictive behavior patterns were to be regarded as eminently rational, if painful and socially notorious, adaptations to social structural deprivation. The functionalist approach tended to stereotype addicts as necessarily socially disadvantaged and sometimes to confuse the trappings of **poverty** with the trappings of addiction. But it had the virtue of freeing sociological research from the presumption of a brute biological basis for addiction and of allowing sociologists to entertain the possibility that people might experience alcohol or drug problems simply as a result of the ways they had learned to use these substances to cope with the social structural circumstances of their lives.

Structural functionalist approaches were rivaled by approaches to addiction (and deviant substance use more generally) proffered by ethnographers broadly allied with **symbolic interactionism**. As part of a more general critical turn against structural **functionalism** in the second half of the twentieth century, many of these sociologists distanced themselves from what David Matza, in his book *Becoming Deviant* (1969) dubbed the "correctional" perspective found in structural functionalist theories of addiction and deviant substance use, and moved towards what he called an "appreciative" analytic stance towards such putatively deviant behavior. Noting that modern **societies** were a good deal more pluralistic and conflicted than structural functionalists had generally allowed, these researchers advocated an agnostic moral regard for putatively dysfunctional or deviant behavior and an effort to empathize with putatively deviant individuals and subcultures. No longer was it assumed that behavior reviled in mainstream **culture** was necessarily viewed negatively by those who themselves engaged in the behavior. Nor was it any longer

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assumed that the social mechanisms according to which these behaviors were produced and sustained need reflect a functional breakdown of either the individual or his or her society. Indeed, many of these studies highlighted the existence of subcultural prestige hierarchies, wherein the use and sale of illicit substances was valued as a mark of adventurousness and other subculturally valued characteristics. Substance use was depicted as a source of meaning in the lives of users. Hence studies focused on such matters as drug slang or argot, the settings of drug-related activity, the **norms** and practices characteristic of drug and alcohol using subcultures, and the **careers** through which drug users passed as they moved from initiates to seasoned veterans of drug- or alcohol-using social worlds. The concept of career has also been used by researchers to emphasize the important **influence** exercised by labeling on putatively addictive behavior patterns.

More recently, the topic of addiction has been taken up by leaders in **rational choice theory** who have properly recognized it as an apparent counterexample to the axiomatic proposition that **social action** is necessarily rational action. Some of these theorists have sought to reconcile empirical instances of addictive patterns of behavior with core propositions of rational choice theory. Others have concluded that addiction is essentially irrational and more thoroughly rooted in neurological dysfunction than micro-economic decision-making mechanisms. While these efforts have produced some interesting technical refinements of rational choice theory itself, they have done less to shed new sociological light on why some people seem to experience rather severe levels of difficulty refraining from the use of alcohol or drugs, even after repeated negative experiences with them. Another more recent line of theoretical work on addiction hails from attribution theory. Attribution theorists turn their attention away from why certain people fall into apparently addictive behavior patterns and instead consider social and psychological explanations for why people attribute behavior to addictions. Attribution theory properly highlights the fact that objective characteristics of social behavior and efforts to explain that behavior are intimately linked to one another. In addition to research that considers why certain activities are so addictive for certain people, fruitful insights can come from the study of why the concept of addiction is itself so compelling for certain people acting in certain social contexts.

To date, sociologists have illuminated various important dimensions of problematic substance

**addiction**

use but have recurrently found it almost impossible to validate the concept of addiction without recourse to biological accounts of physiological dysfunction. Those who have taken the idea of involuntary substance use seriously have overwhelmingly incorporated reference to biological mechanisms as indispensable elements of their own sociological theories. In contrast, the vast majority of those who have not drawn from biology have found it difficult to account for the apparently involuntary aspects of addiction. In his book *The Alcoholic Society* (1993), Norman Denzin develops a theory of “the alcoholic self” which takes important theoretical strides towards a more thoroughly sociological explanation by incorporating his more general approach to the sociology of **emotions** into his theory of addiction. While an undeniably important contribution, Denzin’s research on the emotionality of addiction exhibits consequential ambiguities that make it difficult to square fully with the claim that addictive patterns of behavior are genuinely involuntary. In a series of essays including “The Embodiment of Addiction” (2002, *Body and Society*), Darin Weinberg has drawn upon the growing literature on the sociology of embodiment to reconcile the **phenomenology** of addiction as involuntary affliction with the longstanding sociological claim that people might acquire problematic patterns of substance use simply by virtue of the ways they have learned to use these substances to cope with the social structural circumstances of their lives. He argues that the sociology of embodiment allows us to appreciate more fully that not all meaningful, or socially structured, behavior is behavior that we deliberately choose or with which we self-identify. This work suggests a fruitful interface between the sociology of embodiment, the sociology of moral inclusion, and sociological work on the boundaries of human agency.

Rather predictably, most contemporary sociological research on drugs and alcohol focuses on questions pertaining to the various **social problems** that arise from either substance use itself or the **social policies** in place to control substance use. No doubt these questions will, and should, continue to occupy the attentions of social scientists, whether or not they require use of a concept of addiction. But the sociology of addiction as such also holds promise as a valuable empirical test case for **social theories** concerned with the relationship between much more general sociological themes, including nature/culture, structure/agency, **rationality**, emotion, embodiment, and **social exclusion**. This type of research will

## Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund (1903–1969)

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certainly require a vigilant enforcement of the conceptual distinction highlighted earlier – that between addiction per se and voluntary activity that is merely deviant.

DARIN WEINBERG

### Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund (1903–1969)

Born in Frankfurt, Germany, on September 11, 1903, into an upper-class bourgeois family, the son of a German Jewish father and Italian Catholic mother, Adorno studied philosophy, psychology, and musicology at the University of Frankfurt where he received his PhD in 1924. With the rise to power of Hitler's **fascism**, Adorno first emigrated to England and then joined the Institute for Social Research in exile at Columbia University in New York.

During the 1930s, he became closely connected with the Institute's attempt to develop a **critical theory** of society. This involved Adorno in one of the first attempts to develop a Marxian critique of mass culture, which Adorno and the Institute discerned was becoming ever more significant as an instrument of ideological manipulation and social control in democratic **capitalist**, fascist, and **communist** societies. Working with the "father of mass communications," **Paul Lazarsfeld**, at the Princeton Radio Project and then at Columbia University, Adorno participated in one of the first sustained research projects on the effects of popular music. Later, Adorno was also to work on one of the first attempts to develop a critical analysis of television, producing an article on "How to Look at Television" in 1954.

Adorno was a key member of the interdisciplinary social research projects at the Institute and worked on their studies of fascism and anti-Semitism. Adorno and Institute director **Max Horkheimer** went to California in the early 1940s, where they worked closely on the book that became *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1948 [trans. 1972]). In *Minima Moralia* (1974) and other essays of the period, Adorno continued the Institute's studies of the growing hegemony of capitalism and the integration of the working class as a conservative force of the capitalist system. In such a situation, deeply influenced by his sojourn in New York and California, Adorno only saw the possibility of individual revolt. He also feared, however, the resurgence of **authoritarianism** in the United States and collaborated on a groundbreaking collective study of *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) with a group of Berkeley researchers. The project embodied the Institute's desire to merge theoretical construction with empirical research and produced a portrait of a

disturbing authoritarian potential in the United States. Adorno was responsible for elaborating the theoretical implications and helped design the research apparatus.

In the early 1950s, Adorno returned with Horkheimer to Germany to reestablish the institute in Frankfurt. Here, Adorno continued his studies in sociology and culture, though he turned primarily to philosophy in the last years of his life. During the 1950s, he participated in the Institute's sociological studies of education, students, workers, and the potential for democracy. Adorno wrote many sociological essays at this time and participated in the debates published in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (1976). In these debates, Adorno defended the Institute's conception of dialectical social theory against positivism and the "critical rationalism" defended by **Karl Popper** and other neopositivists.

Increasingly critical of communism and skeptical of Marxism, Adorno primarily engaged in cultural criticism and studies of philosophy and aesthetics during his last decade. As he died suddenly of a heart attack in 1969, his magnum opus, *Aesthetic Theory*, was published posthumously (1984).

DOUGLAS KELLNER

### aesthetics

A notion invented in the eighteenth century in the German-speaking world, the term aesthetics was bequeathed to the history of ideas with philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750–8). As developed by Baumgarten, aesthetics was the study of the beautiful. He conceived of this project as a science of "sensuous cognition," and from its inception aesthetics was concerned with the effects of art works on their recipients, perhaps most famously illustrated in Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) concept of the sublime and the idea of purposeless, transcendental art works. In the English-speaking world, aesthetics was subsumed under a concern with the philosophy of taste and is represented in the work of John Locke (1632–1704) and David Hume (1711–76).

As the century waned, British and continental theories of aesthetics were increasingly preoccupied with notions of beauty and unity in the arts, pointing to structural correlates between music and the plastic arts in terms of their effects, and fueling more general notions of unity in the arts and sciences, notions that would continue to develop in the following century. As part of the general rise of interest in aesthetics, Aristotle's *Poetics* was translated into English in 1789. During the second half of the eighteenth century, an



## affirmative action

acquaintance with the science of aesthetics was often considered to be part of an individual's equipment for social life, and it is here that the initial conception of aesthetics as the science of beauty and its effects began to provide seeds for subsequent critical considerations of the role of the arts in relation to social classification. Concurrently in the late eighteenth century, the arts flourished, stimulated by burgeoning publics, **urbanization**, and the status-seeking strategies of increasingly professionalized artistic workers in London, Paris, Vienna, and other European cities. During these years, new aesthetic hierarchies were articulated by artistic workers and appropriated by arts consumers as a resource for status creation and maintenance.

Many sociologists of the arts have described how aesthetics (understood as beauty and value) and taste in the arts have been resources for social boundary work. **Pierre Bourdieu**, for example, sought to turn Kant on his head in *Distinction* (1979 [trans. 1984]), by arguing that aesthetics could never be disinterested but was rather linked to **lifestyle** and position in social space. More recently, scholarship in environmental and **social psychology**, arts sociology, and cultural geography has returned to the original focus of aesthetics, albeit from an empirical and pragmatically oriented perspective, highlighting the concept of aesthetic ecology and aesthetic agency, and developing theories of what may be afforded by art works and aesthetic materials broadly construed.

TIA DENORA

## affirmative action

Affirmative action, or positive **discrimination** as it is known in the United Kingdom, entails the provision of various types of advantages to members of **groups** who have been systematically oppressed for their membership in that group. The term stems from the legal understanding of affirmative or positive remedies which compel wrong-doers to do something in addition to merely refraining from the wrong-doing itself. Affirmative action policies can be found throughout the world. Though they can focus on any group that has suffered systematic discrimination, affirmative action policies tend most often to concern ethnic groups historically oppressed within a given society, and women. They tend to provide advantages in the domains of **education**, employment, **health**, and social welfare.

Affirmative action first became a topic of serious debate in the wake of the civil rights movements of the 1960s when it was discovered that

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legal proscriptions against historical wrong-doings were not wholly successful in creating equal opportunities for members of historically oppressed groups. Activists began suggesting that, in addition to the negative remedies proscribing discrimination against historically oppressed groups, it would be necessary to implement affirmative or positive strategies to correct past wrongs. Various approaches have been taken to distributing affirmative action advantages. Some societies have favored quota systems that require the ratio of recipients of certain scarce resources, like state building contracts or university admissions, to resemble the ratio found in the larger society between majority and minority groups. Others have favored a less restrictive entitlement to consider issues of **ethnicity** and **gender** in deciding how best to distribute scarce resources. But, regardless of approach, affirmative action policies have very often met with rather fierce resistance, primarily from members of historically privileged groups who resent what they call reverse discrimination. Much more rarely, resistance has come from members of the groups presumed to benefit from affirmative action on the grounds that affirmative action policies sustain racial, ethnic, or gender antagonisms and/or prove demoralizing to their beneficiaries.

Sometimes, particular affirmative action policies have been critiqued on the grounds that they tend to benefit only the most privileged among historically oppressed groups and fail to remedy the much more devastating hardships and **inequalities** suffered by what **William Julius Williams** (*The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, 1987) has called the "truly disadvantaged." In addition to failing to help the most disadvantaged segments of historically oppressed groups, it has been suggested that such policies discredit affirmative action as such by giving benefits to people who neither deserve nor need them. In place of ethnicity- and gender-based affirmative action policies that are insensitive to the comparative hardships suffered by their recipients, some have suggested policies more explicitly pegged to actual disadvantage. These kinds of arguments have met with vigorous counterarguments suggesting that race- and gender-based affirmative action remain crucial to the project of institutionalizing a more egalitarian society. Many high-profile former recipients of affirmative-action advantages, including former American Secretary of State Colin Powell, have come out in favor of such policies despite political pressures not to do so.

DARIN WEINBERG

## affluent society

### affluent society

*The Affluent Society* is the title of an influential book originally published by the American economist, John Kenneth Galbraith (1908–2006) in 1958 (there have been numerous subsequent editions). As a work of **political economy**, it begins with a critique of classical political economists (such as Adam Smith [1723–90] and David Ricardo [1771–1823]) who had emphasized above all the primacy of increasing production and the requirement for a minimum of public consumption (that is, low taxes) if this was to be achieved. This he labeled as “conventional wisdom,” better adapted to historic conditions than to the realities of the contemporary United States, which had become, after World War II, an “affluent society,” one whose productive capacities could easily meet the needs of its citizens. Indeed, under conditions of affluence, production could be increased only through the creation of new desires and needs via advertising and marketing, which succeeds because of the development of a “culture of emulation.” Moreover, the lack of investment in public goods (schools, parks, roads and refuse disposal) had created a world of “private affluence and public squalor,” in which, for example, increasingly elaborate private cars clog increasingly inadequate public roads. Galbraith argues for increased expenditure on public goods, and that the “social balance” between the allocation of resources to private and public goods must be created by political organizations. He also identifies the emergence of a new class (see **social class**) of educated labor, for whom work itself is considered to be a source of recreation, and for whom the maximization of income is not a primary goal. The expansion of this class will also contribute to an improved social balance.

ROSEMARY CROMPTON

### affluent worker

The argument that sections of the working class had experienced *embourgeoisement* became popular in the 1950s and 1960s, to explain changing **values** and political allegiances among manual workers. Increasing affluence was seen to underpin a move from working-class to middle-class **lifestyles** and values, so that such workers *became* middle-class. This argument was challenged, both theoretically and empirically, by **J. Goldthorpe** and colleagues, in *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (1969). They agreed that important changes had occurred in the market and work experience of affluent manual workers, but argued that related changes in lifestyles (privatism) and political attitudes (instrumentalism) remained

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distinctively working-class. Partial convergence with white-collar workers should not be conflated with assimilation to the middle class.

This neo-Weberian analysis challenged presumptions about the necessary decline of **trade unions** and the United Kingdom Labour Party, just as union membership was growing and the Labour Party regained electoral success. Instead, these authors portrayed a movement from a “traditional **solidarity**” working class to an increasingly “instrumental collectivist” working class. In turn, however, the adequacy of this contrast and projection was widely challenged, as shifts in forms of working-class class consciousness and organization were found to be more varied, uncertain, and contested, for example by F. Devine in *Affluent Workers Revisited* (1992). This encouraged more complex accounts of the relationships between working-class experience, forms of consciousness, and **politics**, undermining strong claims for links between specific class locations and forms of consciousness and action, which had been shared by many currents in British studies of **social class**.

TONY ELGER

### African-American studies

This field of interdisciplinary studies charts the experiences of people of African descent in black Atlantic societies including the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America. It studies the social structures and cultures that African people in the **diaspora** have created. More specifically, it studies the social, cultural, and political processes that have shaped the experience of people of African ancestry. There are a large number of study centers and research institutes providing interdisciplinary programs in higher education in the United States. Many of these centers, such as the University of California Los Angeles Center for African American Studies (1969), date from the 1960s. The National Association of African American Studies was founded by Dr. Lemuel Berry Jr. at the Virginia State University at Ettrick, Virginia, in 1992 and it held its first annual conference in 1993. African-American studies draws some of its intellectual inspiration from the work of black American **intellectuals** such as **W. E. B. Du Bois**, and the Institute for Afro-American Studies at Harvard University (1975) is named after him.

There are several academic journals that cater to this interdisciplinary field, including the *Journal of Black Studies* (1970), *The Black Scholar* (1969), the *Western Journal of Black Studies* (1977), and *Womanist Theory and Research* (1994) from the Womanist Studies Consortium at the University of Georgia.