

PERSONALITY ASSUMPTIONS IN SOCIOLOGY:

**THE CASE OF AMERICAN
STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALISM**

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ABSTRACT

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A long-standing controversy in sociology is whether explanation should be formed in terms of social facts or in terms of psychological reductionism. The problem is explored through the example of the psychological assumptions of American structural-functionalism as represented by Parsons. He uses the tension-reduction hypothesis as his postulate regarding personality, and it is shown to predispose researchers to a conservative bias. The role construct, which he also uses, is a further source of conservative bias.

Another personality assumption, the optimal-tension hypothesis, is introduced. It is shown not to have a conservative bias, and, with the role construct, to have good explanatory power. The result of using both is that the researcher expects internal, as well as external, disruption of groups.

The optimal-tension hypothesis is explicitly taken as a postulate, and appropriate changes are made in Merton's "A Paradigm for Functional Analysis in Sociology." A research article that takes a functionalist perspective is analyzed through Merton's paradigm and then is examined for the effects of the two psychological assumptions.

The conclusion drawn is that all non-sociological assumptions should be made as explicit as possible to avoid implicitly biasing sociological theories and research.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One controversy in sociological theory is the manner in which sociological explanations should be formulated. On one side are those who are opposed to the use of psychology in formulating sociological explanations. Durkheim is the clearest example of this point of view.¹ He believes that only social facts are important to sociological explanations. Psychological facts are of no use to him for this purpose. Robert K. Merton is the inheritor of Durkheim's methods in America; in most of his essays his emphasis is on the explanation of social phenomena by other social phenomena.²

This non-reductionist approach to sociology has been opposed by Homans.³ Homans argues that the only valid way to approach sociological phenomena is through psychological reductionism. He suggests that by starting with the appropriate statements from psychology, the researcher can develop theories that deduce sociological hypotheses which can be tested.

While there are other differences between Homans on the one hand, and Durkheim and Merton on the other, the key difference is probably their approach to the use of psychological explanations. Homans criticizes the point of view of Durkheim and Merton when he says that functionalism starts with propositions that refer not to man but to societies and to the needs of these societies.⁴ But he does admit that "in principle, there could indeed be functional theories that set all

the requirements of genuine explanation."⁵

The problem of the use of psychology in sociology involves both the unity of social science and the status of the individual in group explanations. If sociological explanations are not to utilize knowledge discovered in the other social sciences, the implication is that the divisions between disciplines are not simply somewhat artificial means of dividing knowledge, but are more nearly absolute distinctions. This could only be held to be the case if no assumptions need be made by the researcher that are not part of the realm of sociology. However, Homans' work suggests that psychological assumptions, among others, are involved in at least some sociological explanations.

The issue of implicit psychological assumptions in sociology is discussed cogently by Argyris.⁶ He argues that various organizational theorists, such as Blau and Crozier, though lacking an explicit model of man, have an implicit model which they use in theorizing. Argyris feels that these theorists intend to be value neutral in conducting their research but "the unintended consequence of this theorizing is to maintain the status quo."⁷ The reason for this unintended consequence is the implicit personality theory, not the explicit sociological theory.

Argyris gives an example to show how implicit assumptions can bias the researcher unintentionally to maintain the status quo. He says that dissonance or attribution theory predicts that "the interpersonal world of most people in ongoing organizations is characterized by such more abstract, conformity, and aloofness than trust, individuality, and openness."⁸ Predictions from this theory are readily confirmed because of the structural features of abstract, conforming, and aloofness. The result, he says, is that

findings based on descriptive research will tend to opt⁹ for the status quo.

. . . If students learn that it is natural to deal with post-decisional events by reducing dissonance, they will begin to behave in these ways. The concept of man implicit in such a theory becomes reinforced. It looks like it is natural because most people behave this way most of the time.⁹

Since people's behavior can be altered to fit more with theorizing predicting trust, individuality, and openness (e.g., through the experience of a T group), the conclusion is that mistrust, conformity, and closedness are not inevitable and natural, but only typical. A different kind of research, based on the potentialities of man, is possible.

If one replies that such behavior is rarely observed, we would agree and then ask for the systematic research to tell us how the behavior may be made more frequent. . . .

Unless scholars are willing to develop new views of our society, the descriptive research that is conducted will tend to support the status quo.¹⁰

This example shows one way in which implicit psychological assumptions can have an effect on the results of sociological research. While it cannot be expected that all sociological theorists make psychological assumptions that materially affect their theories, it is suggested that many of them do make such assumptions. For this reason, the psychological assumptions contained in sociological theories and research must be made explicit to avoid unintended consequences from implicit psychological assumptions.

This thesis will be concerned with the possible psychological assumptions of one group of sociologists, the structural-functionalists. The reasons for choosing the structural-functionalists are two-fold. They have been the most numerous of all kinds of sociologists in the U.S.A. since the Second World War, and they have psychological assumptions that affect their sociological theory in that they have often

been accused of a conservative bias in their formulations.¹² Since their stated intention is toward value neutrality, and they strongly deny their conservative bias,¹³ it would be useful to identify any conservative bias that may be found in their formulations.

The structural-functionalists are inheritors of the anthropological tradition of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, as well as the tradition of Durkheim's sociology.¹⁴ Merton has come the closest of any sociologist to defining functionalism in his "A Paradigm for Functional Analysis in Sociology."¹⁵ The problem with defining functionalism is rooted in the ambiguity of the word "function." Nagel lists six different meanings.¹⁶ Merton has a section on "The Vocabularies of Functional Analysis" in which he not only gives the different meanings of the word "function," but also gives many synonyms used for it in social scientific writing.¹⁷ It seems possible to establish what functionalism is only by examining how it is used in functional analysis. Merton has attempted in his paradigm to codify this use, and this will be assumed to convey approximately how functional analysis is carried out. Analysis of the paradigm will be undertaken in Chapter V below.

As indicated above, structural-functionalism has been accused of having a conservative bias. This term is often ambiguous and it is, therefore, necessary to clearly define the usage that will be made of it. It will not be used to refer to a specific moral opinion, but instead will refer to a researcher's bias toward prediction that any currently relatively stable society or group (system) will continue to be relatively stable indefinitely unless acted upon by something external, e.g., something in its environment. This statement implies two things about the conservatively biased researcher: that (1) a

relatively stable group will be expected to remain that way unless an external change occurs, and (2) the researcher will look first for external environmental factors as explanations of change. It may be that the assumption regarding stability could lead the researcher to believe that the status quo should not be changed, but there is no necessity for the latter belief to follow from the assumption of continuity of the society or group.

Whether a society or group is to be designated "relatively stable" is a question for the individual researcher. It will depend on whether the researcher can see internal stresses that he would predict might disrupt the society or group. The interpretation of "future relative stability" grows out of the definition that the researcher has decided on for "relative stability," looking historically at that society or group. The kind of change that would be called a disruption or abrupt change also depends on the researcher's historical examination. Whether it is a change of values, norms, the social structure, or some combination that would constitute a disruption depends on the individual researcher's prior analysis. Clearly, the most important factors that would enter into the definition of disruption would involve the rate of change and the difference in the rate from what it has been in the past.

A key concept in the above formulation of the conservative bias is the word "bias," also to be referred to as "predisposition." Since this thesis will be dealing with psychological assumptions that do not require specific conclusions, it will only be possible to show possible tendencies that follow from the assumptions. Every researcher is different, and so it is possible that the same assumption may pro-

dispose different researchers to different biases. On the other hand, most people, given a specific assumption, may have the same bias. If a specific assumption produces a similar bias in most people, it is termed a predisposition.

The specific area to be examined in this thesis is the possible effect of psychological assumptions on sociological theories. Structural-functional theory is chosen as the example because of its importance to North American sociology. While it might have been possible to do a quantitative study of psychological assumptions in structural-functional theorists, this was felt not to be the best tactic because for each theorist in the sample, (1) the psychological assumption would have had to have been identified, which would have required detailed textual analysis of each theorist in the sample; and (2) its effects (independently of all other effects) in his theory would have had to have been ascertained. For even a small sample, this would have involved an inordinately long study as can be seen from the length of the discussion of Parsons in Chapter III below.

An alternative approach is taken instead. After the identification and examination of a psychological assumption that predisposes the researcher to a conservative bias, an example is taken from structural-functional theorists that clearly demonstrates the workings of that psychological assumption. The example chosen is also one of the most important theorists in North American sociology. Talcott Parsons is the creator of a major theoretical system that has influenced many students of the field. While others were, perhaps, taking a similar standpoint in sociology before Parsons, his works, the Structure of Social Action and Toward a General Theory of Action, among many others,

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are important landmarks in American structural-functionalism.¹⁸ It is shown that the analysis of the psychological assumption as a predisposition to a conservative bias has empirical support in at least one leading member of the discipline.

Next an alternative psychological assumption is outlined and the advantages it has over the former assumption are shown. One choice might have been to replace the psychological assumption in Parsons' work with the new assumption and to analyze its effects. However, Parsons' theories do not lend themselves to replacing his psychological assumption with another because such central theoretical constructs as the pattern variables do not follow directly from his psychological assumption.¹⁹ Thus, a change in the psychological assumption would not have allowed changes to have been made with ease in the rest of his theory.

Additionally, it was felt that using a more empirical work would be a better means to show the effects of the various psychological assumptions. The theoretical effects of a change of assumptions can be shown most easily in rewriting segments of Merton's "A Paradigm for Functional Analysis in Sociology,"²⁰ since it is the clearest codification of structural-functionalism that has been attempted. After the appropriate changes are made in the paradigm, it is used as a basis for examining an empirical study to show that the study takes a functionalist perspective. Then the study itself is examined to show the effects of the psychological assumption that leads to a conservative bias and the differences that using the other psychological assumption would make in the study.

The intention in this thesis is to show that the psychological

assumption chosen can have an important effect on sociological theorizing and research, and that it is necessary for such assumptions to be made explicit. Since the two assumptions discussed in this thesis are not the only ones possible, no general statement can be made about the effect of all psychological assumptions. For the two analyzed in this thesis, however, it should become apparent that one predisposes the researcher to a conservative bias, while the other does not. Therefore, if a conservative bias is seen in any specific research or theory to be undesirable, it would be preferable to use the other assumption.

The remaining chapters will examine the relationship between the personality assumptions of structural-functionalism, the role construct, and the resulting conservative bias that these create in structural-functional analysis. Chapter II analyzes the tie between the tension-reduction hypothesis and the conservative bias, which is that of a predisposition. The tension-reduction hypothesis is the assumption that individuals try to maximize gratification, thereby reducing internal tensions, as much as possible. It will be shown in Chapter II that such an assumption leads the researcher to expect that any relatively stable group or society is likely to remain that way. One consequence of this expectation is that he will be unlikely to look at the possibility for internal disruption of the group. The role construct will be shown to reinforce this tendency.

Chapter III presents an example of the biasing effect of the tension-reduction hypothesis. Talcott Parsons' early and later work will be compared. The difference between them is that the early work is a structure for analysis that leads to a conservative bias.

used, while the later work uses the tension-reduction hypothesis. Early Parsons does not show a conservative bias, but later Parsons does. The examination of this conservative bias in Parsons is useful in showing the effects of the introduction of the personality assumption.

In Chapter IV the tension-reduction hypothesis will be replaced by another psychological assumption: the optimal-tension hypothesis. The resulting predispositions for structural-functional sociology will be examined. The optimal-tension hypothesis states that each individual has a preferred level of tension at any given time, a level which he strives to achieve and maintain. The difference from the tension-reduction hypothesis is that the optimal-tension level may be higher than the lowest possible tension level. The results of replacing the hypothesis will be examined both for the hypothesis alone and when it is combined with the role construct, showing that the new psychological assumption no longer creates a conservative bias in sociological research.

In the fifth chapter those sections of Merton's "A Paradigm for Functional Analysis in Sociology" that require changes because of the replacement of the personality hypothesis will be rewritten. The paradigm will then be used to analyze an empirical research to show that the research takes a functionalist perspective, and the study will be examined to show that the tension-reduction hypothesis in it creates problems for the analysis of the data. The advantages of using the optimal-tension hypothesis will be demonstrated.

In the final chapter conclusions will be drawn for the use of psychology in sociological analysis.

CHAPTER II

THE TENSION-REDUCTION HYPOTHESIS

The manner in which structural-functional theories demonstrate their conservative bias will be examined in later chapters. In this chapter the psychological background to this bias will be examined. It is the hypothesis of this thesis that a structural-functional analysis is not, of necessity, conservative. The conservative bias is introduced by the assumption that most theorists make regarding the nature of the human personality, especially when it is combined with the concept of role. If a different assumption is used in a structural-functional analysis, the bias either would be lessened considerably, or would vanish completely.¹

The basic personality assumption postulated by American structural-functionalists (among other theorists) is an optimal gratification model, equivalent to a maximal tension reduction model.² A person is postulated to have certain needs that he requires to have fulfilled. These needs range from the biological prerequisites for life (such as the need for food) to secondary needs of social rather than biological origin (such as the need to play cards every Saturday night). Because there are many different needs involved, each having a certain priority for fulfillment, a person must make choices. Since, as a result, the fulfillment of some needs is incompatible with the fulfillment of other needs (you can't both go to sleep and play baseball at the same time),

there are needs that must go partially or completely unfulfilled at any given time.

Tension results from the demand of an unfulfilled need to be gratified. Since the various needs of a person are ranked by that person in terms of importance, there are needs which will be more demanding of fulfillment than others, and their non-fulfillment will create a greater tension than will the non-fulfillment of less important needs. When the assumption is made that the person will attempt to gratify all the needs he possibly can, taking into account that the more important needs are gratified before the less important, it is clear that the overall tension level must be reduced to as low a level as possible. For each person there will be a level at which the overall tension cannot be reduced by fulfilling more needs or by not meeting some needs and fulfilling others. This is the optimally low tension level. The theory of a person's seeking optimally low tension will be called the tension-reduction hypothesis.

If a person lived alone in the world, this statement of the tension-reduction hypothesis would be complete. Such a person would have to consider only his needs and the means by which he would satisfy them. Complications ensue, however, when the individual person lives in co-operation with and is dependent upon other people in a group. Both for utilitarian and for emotional reasons, the needs and wants of others must be taken into account in each social action of a person. This is the case, not only in the interest of group harmony, but also in the interest of survival, since the group may be strong enough to impose sanctions on any single person who acts against its perceived interests.

The tension-reduction hypothesis is applicable to the group situation as well as to the individual situation, but with a significant difference. Each individual must now balance his own gratification with the requirements of the group and the other group members. Optimal gratification is still possible given a particular situation. But optimal gratification for a given individual is less in the group than for the hypothetically isolated individual because there may be more incompatible needs between people than within one person alone.

An extreme example might be useful as an illustration. Consider a master-slave situation where the master has total power over the slave. The master is able to use all the surplus production of the slave for himself, but he still has to give some food to the slave so that the slave can continue to work for him. In taking the slave's requirements into consideration, the master must give up part of his goal of the accumulation of greater resources in order for the arrangement to continue. This example illustrates that in any social interaction the participants must, of necessity, give up some immediate gratification in order for an interpersonal arrangement to survive. In this case it is only a little food, for a large future return. In most instances, in which people are conceived of as more equal than in this example, much more will have to be given up by the individual so that as many needs can be satisfied as possible.

Even though individual needs will have to be unmet, in any group there will be a stable point at which a balance (equilibrium) is reached so that the smallest amount of tension exists overall (unless there is such scarcity that all the true necessities of life cannot be given to everyone). In the state of equilibrium, the maximum number

of needs will be gratified and the most important--i.e., tension-producing--needs will be satisfied first. It is at this particular optimal level that a group would be most stable. It would follow from the tension-reduction hypothesis that the members of the group would wish to maintain this overall, stable, low tension level. Deviations from it--i.e., individuals who create increasing tensions in some way--would usually be dealt with quickly and severely so that the equilibrium is recreated. A change in the external conditions, such as drought, or an attack by another group, would necessitate a reformation of an equilibrium at another level because different means would be needed to satisfy the same needs, and because the needs that would be capable of satisfaction would change. But as long as the environment changed little, the group would be expected to continue as before because any change would mean that the overall tension level--as expressed by unfulfilled needs--would increase.

Thus far, we have a picture of the group members attempting to reduce tensions to the lowest possible level. Given the tension-reduction hypothesis, no person within a currently stable group would be expected to mar the equilibrium in a relatively unchanging environment, because changes could mean that the needs that are currently being fulfilled will possibly cease to be satisfied. Of course, empirically sometimes people do disrupt the equilibrium of groups, but this disruption would be expected to be dealt with swiftly by all the other members of the group who have a stake in the maintenance of the status quo. Such a disruption could only be seen as an irrational act.

The groups that are dealt with in American structural-function-

alism are assumed, generally, to be in approximate equilibrium with a relatively stable environment. Clearly, some groups at some times experience great turmoil. Some of this turmoil can be explained by external environment changes, but some cannot. This residue, which would seem to stem from accumulated internal strains within the group, is not easily explainable under the tension-reduction hypothesis. Sources of strain can be seen as stemming from either internal or external causes (or their interaction), internal causes resulting from changes in the relations of individuals to each other, external causes resulting from changes in the environment. If there are no sufficient external causes to explain change that has occurred, the researcher must turn to internal explanations for the change. But, given a relatively stable group, no sufficient sources of internal strain would be apparent under the tension-reduction hypothesis. One solution would be for the researcher to point to those strains that actually became uncontrolled and to deduce that these strains were the cause; that is, these strains precluded an optimally low tension level. This begs the question and is not very useful as an explanation.

A second alternative explanation would be for the researcher to explain that most groups cannot actually reach a sufficiently low tension level even though it is what individuals strive for, which is another way of saying that the lowest possible group tension level is not low enough for most individuals to be satisfied with. This explanation might be sufficient if a structural peculiarity of groups creates a limiting mechanism that precludes sufficient tension reduction. In this case the psychological theory would require major changes for sociological application. As will be shown in later chapters, Parsons

has not made such changes.

The second alternative is not parsimonious because it introduces new assumptions to an old theory, while another theory will explain the facts as well without additional assumptions, as will be shown in Chapter IV. The first alternative remains conservative because it does not suggest that relatively stable groups can collapse from internal processes alone, thereby leading to the assumption that such a group will remain stable unless there is environmental change.

On a group level, accepting the tension-reduction hypothesis will thus predispose the researcher to a conservative bias: the expectation of group continuity for an indefinite time, assuming the environment remains constant. The researcher would expect that the society, as constituted, if it has been stable for any reasonable period of time, would be unlikely to be disrupted from within. Certainly, such a disruption would always be possible, but unlikely and unexpected.

The tension-reduction hypothesis as stated above is still incomplete because it implies that an individual can be looked at as a member of a single group, when he is really a member of many groups at the same time. The idea of membership in many groups is most often handled by the concept of role.³ This concept contains a bias, as does the tension-reduction hypothesis, toward the maintenance of the status quo. It refers to a person's filling a specific, socially-defined, status-position. A person can have many roles, each one being completely different from every other. For example, a man might be a clerk, father, husband, Saturday night poker player, part-time novelist, household chef, etc. Each of these roles is socially defined (by the whole soci-

ety for the role of clerk, by a small group for the role of poker player). The man can be viewed as filling each of the role/status-positions he enacts either well or poorly. Assuming always that the society in which the position exists is fairly stable, researchers would turn their consideration to the performance of the role-incumbent. If the incumbent does not fill his position well, that is, as required by the society, he would be labeled a deviant, and adjustments would be expected to be made to eliminate the deviance.

The conservative bias of the concept of role is apparent from the above. A researcher using the role concept would tend to regard a person filling a position badly as simply deviant. When the concept of role is combined with the tension-reduction hypothesis, there is an interaction which reinforces the conservative biases of each. The tension-reduction hypothesis requires that in a single group, the individual person considers the total group tension level.⁴ When the overall tension level of the group is the lowest possible, the utilitarian interests of all the group members are best served by a continuation of the status quo. If the tension level became higher than optimum, there would be a jockeying for gratification and no person could be sure of satisfaction because no one could predict what might occur. For this reason, the greatest number of people within any group attempt to maintain an optimally low tension level as the status quo.

Since people belong to many groups at the same time, the concept of role has been well suited to describe the expression of people's behavior in groups. As the status-position is defined by the group or society, the individual can be conceptualized as choosing to fill

various suitable status-positions subject to certain socially-defined constraints. The person's role choices could then be expected to be at least approximately suitable. He would be expected to commit only part of his self (personality) in filling any given role because soon he would change to another role and thus should remain flexible in his ability to shift. The researcher would therefore be predisposed to expect that the given individual would interact in a role situation with a certain amount of reserve because the needs he expects to be gratified in any particular role situation are constrained by both the social expectations of the situation and by the needs of every other member of the given group. The difference between the person who is a member of many groups and the hypothetical person who is a member of only one is the following: in choosing his roles at least somewhat voluntarily, the former is also choosing the various groups for the needs that they will fulfill, each group fulfilling only part of his needs. He is likely to support the status quo in any given group, if the tension level is optimally low, because then he is most certain that the needs he wants fulfilled by the given group will indeed be fulfilled. If the tension level is not optimally low, some members of the group will not be getting needs gratified and will leave the group to find other roles better suited to the desired gratifications. The group itself will either ultimately disappear or will reach an optimally low tension level. But the hypothetical person who is a member of only one group must get all his needs fulfilled in that single group. While it is still in his interest to keep the tension level optimally low, he will only do that if the more important of his needs are gratified. If there are people in the group whose basic needs conflict, it may never

be possible to satisfy everyone's needs sufficiently, and a stable level would be impossible. However, for the person who has many different groups to join in the society, this need never be the case because other role choices are available if the current ones are not sufficiently gratifying.

The researcher who combines the tension-reduction hypothesis and the role construct would be predisposed to assume fixed status-positions in the social structure, and some element of choice of which groups to join or which roles to fill. This would assure an approximate fit between roles and their incumbents. Exceptions would be labeled deviants, who, by definition, are in the minority in any stable system. The deviants would tend to disrupt the group, but because they are few in number in a stable group, they would be expected to be controlled and dealt with efficiently. Through the splitting up of whole persons into roles, the researcher would make it very difficult for the status quo to be questioned in any hitherto stable group, unless external changes occur in the environment. The role theorist who accepts the tension-reduction hypothesis would seldom consider it to be a worthy research task to observe a stable group in a constant environment in order to be present when internal strains disrupt the group; it is a possible occurrence, but one that is very unlikely.

To summarize, the tension-reduction hypothesis assumes that individuals will attempt to reduce their tension level to the lowest possible level. For an individual alone, this leaves some tension, albeit a small amount, because some of his needs are in conflict with each other. For an individual in a group, it leaves a somewhat higher

tension level because there would be more conflicts between the needs of many people than within only one person. However, unless a condition of absolute scarcity exists, a lowest possible stable tension level exists for any group; this is the optimally low tension level.

The extension of the tension-reduction hypothesis to more complex groups or societies, in which a person can be a member of many different subgroups, leads to the role construct. This concept implies fixed status-positions, and individual choice in filling status-positions.

Assuming a relatively stable group or society, as defined in Chapter I, the researcher is predisposed to various biases in using these two conceptual tools. The tension-reduction hypothesis leads the researcher to assume that, given no external environmental changes, members of any given group or society will do nothing to disrupt the social structure of that group or society. They will attempt to maintain the status quo in order to be assured of receiving the gratification that is their goal in being members of the group. The role construct will predispose the researcher to examine what would be labeled deviant cases, and to not look into possible disruptions of the social order.

When these two are combined, the researcher will not expect any disruptions to occur from internal processes in a relatively stable group, as he defines it by looking at the group historically. Instead, assuming no environmental changes, he will expect the same relative stability to continue indefinitely into the future. While it is possible that, in spite of this biasing of expectation against any disruption of the society, a researcher may still examine the problem, most investigators could not look for a possible internal disruption since they would expect it to be unlikely to occur.

CHAPTER III

THE TENSION-REDUCTION HYPOTHESIS IN PARSONS

Talcott Parsons has been one of the most influential of modern sociologists. He is the founder of American structural-functionalism, which he sees as the culmination of the different trends in the European sociology of Weber and the idealists, on the one hand, and of Durkheim, Pareto, and the utilitarians, on the other hand.¹ In areas outside of sociology, he acknowledges a debt to Freud and Tolman in psychology.² This psychological orientation helps to formulate the content, as opposed to the structure, of the action theory in his later works.

A comparison of Parsons' early and later works demonstrates the effects of introducing the tension-reduction hypothesis and the role construct to a structure which did not have motivational content. His theory will be examined for a conservative bias, before and after the introduction of the two concepts. In this manner the logic of the last chapter will be substantiated empirically.

Parsons' first major published work is The Structure of Social Action. This book is very different from his later work in that his focus is on action theory rather than on a more properly structural-functional approach.³ Parsons here develops his theory through an analysis of four major theorists (Hegel, Pareto, Durkheim, and Weber)

as well as a host of (in his opinion) more minor theorists. None of the writers he examines are psychologists, and the nature of man in The Structure of Social Action is less clear than in his later works.

The emphasis is on the creation of a voluntaristic theory of action. A social act, when looked at in the action frame of reference, always involves four components: (1) an actor; (2) an end or goal; (3) a situation (conditions), parts of which are alterable, parts of which are inalterable by the actor; and (4) a normative element in making the choice of means.⁴ The voluntaristic part of the act is contained in the concept of effort, which is "the relating factor between the normative and the conditional elements of action. . . . Norms do not realize themselves automatically but only through action. . . . It is. . . . closely analogous to [the analytical status] of energy in physics."⁵

The mechanism by which the individual applies this principle of effort, that is, the motivational aspect of action, is not clearly stated. It is not an instinctual process, clearly, because that would not be voluntaristic. Parsons considers subjectivity to be an important component of motivation: "Without the subjective point of view the theory of action becomes meaningless."⁶ A few pages further on he quotes Weber's definition with approval: "A motive is 'a meaningful complex (. . .), which appears to the actor himself or to the observer to be an adequate (. . .) ground for his attitudes or acts.'"⁷

It is clear that active effort is important for voluntaristic action, and that meaningful considerations by the subjective actor constitute motives. A structure for action has been created, but in this work Parsons has not explained the basic motivation for an act.

In The Structure of Social Action Parsons does not delineate the content of personality, but he does create a theoretical structure. The unit act is the unit of analysis in the action frame of reference. Unit acts are grouped together according to whose acts they are, creating the actor. This is a personality, which is "nothing but the totality of observable unit acts described in their context of relation to a single actor."⁸ Groups are larger aggregates made up of actors as the basic unit.

Since there is no content to the voluntaristic aspect of Parsons' early theory, and since the entire theory is simply a structural form, there is no discussion of the process of teleology. All goals, all ends, all norms are possibilities for the theory. Equilibrium or homeostasis, which later is very important, cannot be a part of this theory. The emphasis is on movement, on acting, which has to imply change for the person in moving toward his goal. Since persons make up groups, as each person changes, each group changes.

While the theory has no content, the application of content in a voluntaristic theory would lead to instability and change as a social model. Thus, as Devereux points out, Parsons' later concern with equilibrium may have arisen in order to explain how stability actually exists (insofar as it does exist) in society.⁹

In his work following The Structure of Social Action, Parsons makes significant changes in his theory of personality.¹⁰ One change is the division of the action system into two, the personality and the social systems. A more important change is the elimination of the unit act as the basic constituent of personality to be replaced by the need-disposition, a motivational concept. Another important change is the

postulating of the role rather than the individual personality as the unit of groups. The effect of these changes is to allow Parsons to hypothesize equilibrium as the goal of a functioning society, an hypothesis which was impossible, as noted above, with the theory in The Structure of Social Action. It will be shown that it is the particular motivational concept which Parsons adds to his theory, along with the role construct, that lends his theory a conservative bias.

The type of changes which take place in Parsons' theory may be typified by his reference to the work of psychologists. In the "Introduction to the Paperback Edition" of The Structure of Social Action Parsons states that in writing the book he was inspired by Gestalt psychology and by Tolman's theory of purposive behavior.¹¹ Tolman remains important in his later work, but the Gestalt psychologists recede, to be replaced by Freud, who is only mentioned twice in The Structure of Social Action in connection with Durkheim's internalizing of constraints.¹² Parsons uses a modification of Freud's tension-reduction motivational system, and from this follows his emphasis on equilibrium in the social system.

Parsons' first postulate in his later work is that the individual is born with innate drives that demand satisfaction. He continues:

The object which is constitutionally most appropriate for the cathexis of a viscerogenic need is, however, seldom absolutely specific. But, on the other hand, the range of variability open to action and cultural definition always has some limits. Among these needs which come to be of primary importance for action, however, the degree of specificity usually tends to be slight, particularly in the mode as distinct from the fact of gratification. In general, there is a wide range of variability of the objects and modes of gratification of any constitutionally given need.¹³

Thus far, the model follows Freud's discussion of the id. The id is the centre of instinct¹⁴ and the most abundant source of internal

excitation.¹⁵ According to Hall,

the sole function of the id is to provide for the immediate discharge of quantities of excitation (energy or tension) that are released in the organism by internal or external stimulation. This function of the id fulfills the primordial or initial principle of life which Freud called the pleasure principle. The aim of the pleasure principle is to rid the person of tension, or, if this is impossible--as it usually is--to reduce the amount of tension to a low level and keep it as constant as possible.¹⁶

Parsons adds that there are also secondary needs:

In addition to the viscerogenic needs there seem to be certain needs for "social relationships." These might be constitutionally given or they might, by being indirectly necessary for the gratification of viscerogenic needs, be derivative in their origin and come subsequently to acquire autonomy.¹⁷

These secondary needs are differentiated from innata drives by being called need-dispositions:

The identifying index of a need-disposition is a tendency on the part of the organism to "strive" for certain relationships with objects, or for certain relationships between objects. And the tendency to "strive" is nothing more than the tendency to cognize and cathect in certain ways and to act in a fashion guided by those cognitions and cathexes. The difference between a need-disposition and a drive . . . lies in the fact that it is not innate, that it is formed or learned in action, and in the fact that it is a tendency to orient and select with an eye to the future, as well as with an eye to immediate gratification.¹⁸

When there is a drive or need-disposition, an organism attempts to satisfy it. A gratifying experience with an object makes the organism wish to attach itself to the object. Removal of the object will create an attempt by the organism to recover it.¹⁹

Parsons' next assumption is that there are many need-dispositions acting in a single person. Two or more need-dispositions may be activated at the same time, but the satisfaction of a single need-disposition may be incompatible with the gratification of the others. Thus complete gratification is impossible, and the actor must make choices to minimize the overall level of tension.²⁰ "The equilibrium

of drive gratification thus operates within the context of an equilibrium of need-dispositions and their systems."²¹ This concept seems to be equivalent to the tension-reduction hypothesis discussed in Chapter II.

Parsons follows this with a direct discussion of the "tension reduction hypothesis." He gives three reasons why it is inadequate:

First, it fails to take explicit account of the organization of the drive element into the system of need-dispositions. Second, "tension" tends to be merely a name for an unknown. . . . Third, explanation of action by tension reduction tends to translate action into an over-simplified, relatively undifferentiated rhythm of tension activation and quiescence, so that specific differentiation in relation to elements of the situation and of orientation of action are obscured.²²

Parsons here takes issue with a simple-minded tension reduction scheme. He points out that tension cannot be reduced to zero because the many need-dispositions interact, and they cannot be satisfied at the same time. Generally, however, he does agree with the Freudian model of tension reduction. Along these lines he refers to the actor's aim to obtain an optimal level of gratification. This optimum is relative to the existing set of need-dispositions in the particular situation, including commitment to certain deprivations in the short run.²³ Thus there is an allocation mechanism to apportion gratification among the various need-dispositions. Within the total personality a process of integration prevents conflicts between the various need-dispositions.²⁴ It is clear that the motivational aspect of Parsons' later theory is indeed a tension-reduction hypothesis, as that term was used in Chapter II. It is, however, free from the criticism that he makes of the hypothesis in the quotation above.

In Freudian terms, the individual's apportioning gratification to his various need-dispositions is equivalent to the superseding of

the pleasure principle by the reality principle. According to the reality principle, the individual will give up uncertain immediate pleasures for later, more important, pleasures.²⁵ The ego is the mechanism by which the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle because of its instinct for self-preservation.²⁶

Freud's personality system is an interactive whole, with the id, the ego, and the superego as the main components. But there are conflicts, not only between instincts, but also between the intentions of the three components, and between the sex instinct (Eros) and the death instinct (Thanatos).²⁷ In the "stabilized personality" a fragile equilibrium tends to be formed.²⁸ But it is clear from Freud's emphasis on psychopathology and neurosis that such an equilibrium often breaks down. Parsons does not stop, as Freud does, with a fragile integration of the personality system. His emphasis is on system and integration. Dahrendorf even berates Parsons for being utopian in not looking at the critical facts of experience.²⁹

For Parsons, the personality is "the organized system of the orientation and motivation of action of one individual actor."³⁰ The functional prerequisites of this system are:

(1) From the outside, or from the scientific observer's viewpoint, it is the problem of maintaining a bounded system; in other words, it is the personality's problem of continuing to be the kind of system it is. (2) From the inside, or from the actor's viewpoint, it is the problem of optimization of gratification.³¹

The internal problem of optimization of gratification is the same as the optimal reduction of tension, as shown in Chapter II, since the greater the gratification, the lower the resultant tension level. Parsons refers to the two external problems as the adaptive-integrative problem, which the ego is organized to solve, and the pattern-maintenance

problem, which the superego is organized to solve.³²

One aspect of the adaptive-integrative problem is that of the conflicting needs of the various need-dispositions. The major mechanism postulated for dealing with this problem is some action on the part of the actor to change the perception of the situation, either internally so that the facts no longer are seen to conflict, or externally through some physical intervention. In either case, the conflict is made to disappear.³³

The internal aspect of integration can be seen as a concern with tension.

Tension, as we should like to use the term, exists in so far as the actual "position" of one or more units in the system involves a discrepancy relative to the position, which in terms of necessities of their own equilibrium as systems they ought to occupy. . . . "Tension" is, of course, the result of mechanisms internal to the unit, as well as its direct reactions to the larger system of units of which it is a part.³⁴

Tension can be reduced, not only by changing objects external to the system, but also by maneuvering parts of the system. "The need-disposition of the member of a social group, is, from a different vantage point, itself a system which has its own set of conditions of equilibrium."³⁵ Parts of a given need-disposition can be changed so as to make it more compatible with other need-dispositions, thereby leading to a more integrated personality system. A possible conflict could be eliminated, for example, by substituting a new object of interest for the old object that caused conflicts in the system.³⁶

Parsons is careful not to leave the impression that everything can be perfectly integrated. He states in the case of the personality system that "the integration of personality in terms of the value system is always less than perfect—and is, in fact, usually considerably

so."³⁷ But his emphasis remains clearly on integration: "The tendency in a system, the equilibrium of which has been disturbed, will, we assume, be to restore the equilibrium by eliminating the source of the disturbance."³⁸

This last quotation leads directly into the pattern-maintenance problem, since equilibrium might be thought of as an integrated, stable, dynamic pattern. On the personality level, the process of pattern-maintenance is not analyzed in the same detail as is the integrative aspect. However, the following postulates are given as the four conditions of equilibrium:

1. The Principle of Inertia: A given process of action will continue unchanged in rate and direction unless impeded or deflected by opposing motivational forces.
2. The Principle of Action and Reaction: If, in a system of action, there is a change in the direction of a process, it will tend to be balanced by a complementary change which is equal in motivational force and opposite in direction.
3. The Principle of Effort: Any change in the rate of an action process is directly proportional to the magnitude of the motivational force applied or withdrawn.
4. The Principle of System Integration: Any pattern element (mode of organization of components) within a system of action will tend to be confirmed in its place within the system or to be eliminated from the system (extinguished) as a function of its contribution to the integrative balance of the system.³⁹

If we interpret "opposing motivational forces" as external factors to the action process, then this idea can be seen as a consequence of a conservative bias of looking for explanations of change in external environmental factors primarily, as noted in Chapter I.

Parsons makes a summary statement of the manner in which the equilibrium of the whole personality system is maintained:

The impetus for movement out of the latency⁴⁰ into the adaptive phase⁴¹ is given by "mounting tension" which means a diminution of gratification levels. This is balanced by a combination of increase of satisfaction levels (mainly through achievement) and the prospect of gratification output. As the consummatory phase⁴² is approached, the gratification level rises temporarily above the equilibrium point.⁴³

Parsons ties his theory of personality, with its goal of equilibrium, to the social system through the concept of role:

The role is that organized sector of an actor's orientation which constitutes and defines his participation in an interactive process. It involves a set of complementary expectations concerning his own actions and those of others with whom he interacts. . . . Roles are institutionalized when they are fully congruous with the prevailing culture patterns. . . .

The abstraction of an actor's role from the total system of his personality makes it possible to analyze the articulation of personality with the organization of social systems.⁴⁴

A role is an organized complex of motivational units.⁴⁵ At the level of personality, each role establishes stable patterns of need-dispositions.⁴⁶ It should be noted that in contrast to his theory in The Structure of Social Action, the unit of the social system is not the personality or the whole person, but is now segments of persons called roles. These roles form the mechanism by which individuals fit into slots in the social structure. Thus Parsons clearly puts the emphasis on the person's fitting or not fitting into a given social structure, rather than on questioning whether the social structure fits what is needed for the whole person.

Parsons does not, however, make the mistake of assuming that people fill roles perfectly, or of making the requirements of roles too specific. Indeed, he says that a certain range of variability within the same role must be regarded as legitimate.⁴⁷ Not only is there not complete integration of the personality into the social system, but persons' attitudes towards a given role may differ even though they all fill the role as required.⁴⁸ Thus, there is enough slippage to make the system workable.

Roles, along with the socialization of people into the roles that they fill, are vitally important to the social system. For Parsons,

it is through these two mechanisms that the Hobbesian problem of order is solved.⁴⁹

The position that Parsons took in 1937 was different from his later position in that it was a social action theory. The scientist using the action frame of reference as outlined by Parsons puts his theoretical emphasis on the social act. An act is done by a whole person; the concept of role that segments the personality is not yet present.

The mechanisms of the actor's functioning, that is, the content of the personality, are not developed in The Structure of Social Action, but insofar as the emphasis is on action, there is clearly a tendency to expect changes in the social world. With so much likelihood for rapid change, Parsons puts his emphasis on the question of how social systems survive. In the later theory, while the possibility for change still exists, it is not likely to be seen because the emphasis on the content applied to the action frame of reference would concern the reader more.

This content begins with the regulation of the need-dispositions so that an optimally low tension level is produced. Parsons therefore has to integrate the various need-dispositions into a single system. The lack of integration would cause a build-up of tension. The disruption of the personality system by tension is graphically depicted:

Then progressively, as the tension level mounts, tension-release comes to have priority over other alternative paths of action. The actor becomes progressively more insensitive to the normal stimuli of adaptive and integrative processes, indeed even of opportunities for goal gratification. . . . There is, then, the increasing tendency for action to become a violent process of equilibration.

between sheer "acting out" of tension in personalized symbolic form rather than system-goal-gratification form and, on the other hand, motivated by anxiety, sheer inhibition of what otherwise would be normal activity.⁵⁰

For one individual this would be pathology. For a whole society it would be chaos, should it occur in too many people, and it would rend the social fabric. But the social system functions; tension is kept under control. Therefore, accommodation between people is expected to occur to mutually reduce tension to a low level in any relationship. The desire to maintain tension at a low level requires people to seek consensus in their personal and their social lives.

Parsons explains the process by which an equilibrium forms in the personality system through the mechanisms of pattern-maintenance and integration. Three of his four principles of equilibrium are very similar to Newton's three laws, and the feeling of the unity of nature that stems from Newton's laws carries over into this sociological paradigm as well. Thus a person following the Parsonian system would be predisposed to expect an over-all unity of all systems and would be counter-disposed to finding conflict. All change that would be found would be patterned, lawful, and a part of the equilibrated system.

Parsons' theory contains specific mechanisms by which the status quo is reinforced. The adaptive-integrative mechanism of personality (analogous to the ego) would be unlikely to forgo the gratification which the personality currently gets in its interactions, in favor of the gratification which it might get following change in the social structure. Since change in the structure of social interactions can never have a certain outcome, the mechanism of personality charged with the function of maintaining an optimal level of gratification

would prefer to maintain the current status rather than to take the chance of making its situation less gratifying. Furthermore, the pattern-maintenance mechanism of personality (analogous to the superego) would oppose any movement toward a change which would transform the personality's current social position. Therefore, according to Parsons' personality theory, not only is accommodation to the needs of the other the typical pattern of interaction, but also the individual with the mechanisms of personality that he postulates would be expected to oppose any major change in society. Even without considering the role construct, Parsons' later theory has a conservative bias. The addition of the role construct only reinforces the bias.

Parsons' theory of personality is a significant factor in the conservative bias of his social system theory. It is not the social system itself which is at the root of the problem, but the more basic assumptions of his theory. The changes that Parsons makes in going from a social action theory to the structural-functionalist viewpoint, and the additions which he makes to Freud's theory, are both major factors in creating a bias of which Parsons himself seems to be unaware. 51

CHAPTER IV

THE OPTIMAL-TENSION HYPOTHESIS

In previous chapters it has been shown that the tension-reduction hypothesis is a central personality assumption of Parsons, and that this assumption predisposes the theorist to a conservative bias. It has also been demonstrated that Parsons' structural-functional theory shows a conservative bias in that it emphasizes the continuity of the social system studied, making the theorist expect that the system will be unlikely to change in a fundamental way. In fact, the addition of the tension-reduction hypothesis and the role construct to Parsons' early work resulted in a conservative bias in a previously value neutral work.

The next step is to change the personality assumption within a structural-functional framework and to see whether some other assumption would avoid the conservative bias.¹ To that end the optimal-tension hypothesis will be introduced. Its implications will be examined, and then its interaction with the role construct will be analyzed. In the next chapter, the change will be applied to Merton's "A Paradigm for Functional Analysis in Sociology,"² and to the analysis of an example of research from a functionalist perspective in order to examine some of the differences that the new hypothesis makes.

In psychology, the tension-reduction hypothesis (commonly known

as drive reduction theory) has in the last twenty years been replaced as the predominant motivational theory by what will be called the optimal-tension hypothesis. This hypothesis holds that each person has an optimal level of tension that he strives to maintain and that deviation from this tension level leads the person to try to readjust the level to the optimum.³ If the tension is too great, he would try to reduce the tension level; this would be akin to the tension-reduction hypothesis. But if the tension level is lower than the optimum, he would try to increase it by seeking external stimulation.

The movement in psychology from drive reduction to optimal tension began in the late 1940's. The major impetus has been to explain the finding that animals and men both engage in exploratory and play behavior for no apparent reason except that they seem to enjoy it. This finding has led researchers such as White and Fowler to suggest that there is an exploratory drive which operates when the more tension-producing drives such as hunger or fear are satisfied.⁴ It is a drive which is "moderate but persistent."⁵ However, the formulation of an exploratory drive has not found favor among those researchers not already committed to the earlier theory of drive reduction.

Other theorizing has moved towards an optimization format.

Berlyne has explicitly formulated his theory in terms of "an optimal influx of arousal potential."⁶ However, the deviations from this optimum are still seen as drive inducing. McReynolds hypothesizes that organisms have an innate drive to seek new experiences, and that this drive is expressed as the "rate of perceptualization."⁷ When the rate is too low, the result is ennui; when too high for too long a time, the accompanying feeling is anxiety. Only when the rate of perceptu-

alization is in the medial range does the individual experience pleasant satisfaction.

Fiske and Maddi have produced a conceptual framework for exploratory behavior and optimal tension level.⁸ They state their formulation in terms of activation of the organism: an organism maintains its activation level close to its optimum, which varies depending on its stage in a sleep-wakefulness cycle. Some of the organism's behavior would be tension-increasing, such as exploration, while other behavior would be tension-reducing, such as eating when hungry.⁹ Given a specific task, there is a level of activation which is necessary for maximally effective performance.¹⁰ The organism tends to modify its activation level toward the optimal zone for the task at hand,¹¹ assuming that this activation level is not greatly inconsistent with its characteristic activation level at this point of its sleep-wakefulness cycle.¹² In the absence of specific tasks, the behavior of an organism is directed toward the maintenance of activation at the characteristic level.¹³ When task motivation is present so as to raise the motivation level above the optimum, completion of the task reduces activation.¹⁴ Negative affect is ordinarily experienced when the activation level differs markedly from the normal level; positive affect is associated with shifts of activation toward the normal level.¹⁵

The reduction of activation in Fiske and Maddi's theory is equivalent to drive reduction. However, according to the theory, an increase of activation is also necessary at times. Fiske shows that under conditions of monotonous and restricted stimulation, subjects, including humans, seem to create their own stimulation so as to increase the incoming stimulation to a level appropriate to their op-

timal activation level.¹⁶

Fiske and Maddi's activation theory is the personality assumption which I propose to use to replace the tension-reduction hypothesis. I call it the optimal-tension hypothesis to emphasize how it differs from the first theory. The tension-reduction hypothesis states that a person attempts to satisfy needs so as to reduce tension to as low a level as possible. The optimal-tension hypothesis includes the tension-reduction hypothesis, although a zero tension level is inconsistent with it. However, tension-reduction is only part of the theory. The other emphasis is on tension increase, when the level of activation is too low for the person's optimum at the given stage of the sleep-wakefulness cycle.

The replacement of the tension-reduction hypothesis by the optimal-tension hypothesis would not seem to be incompatible with structural-functionalism, and, in fact, may actually be a more appropriate personality assumption for this method of sociological analysis. When Parsons and Merton were formulating their sociological theories, for the most part before 1955, the predominant personality assumption in psychology was a tension-reduction hypothesis. Leube made his important statement of optimal stimulation only in 1955. Since a theory of personality has only the status of a postulate in sociological analysis, it was most reasonable for the founders of American structural-functional sociology to use the then-current personality theory.

However, the tension-reduction hypothesis may not be as appropriate to structural-functionalism as the optimal-tension hypothesis. Structural-functional sociology, especially that of Parsons, emphasizes the equilibrium maintenance and disruptive mechanisms in social groups

and systems. The tension-reduction hypothesis is in a sense alien to this system of conceptualization because it is always a force in a single direction, toward tension-release rather than toward the kind of homeostasis that would be expected from Parsons' sociological formulations. The optimal-tension hypothesis, since it postulates that the organism attempts to maintain a given, but changing, level of arousal, would seem to be closer to the rest of Parsons' formulations. The optimal-tension hypothesis can be conceptualized as a dynamic equilibrium on the individual level.

The use of the optimal-tension hypothesis has certain implications for a structural-functional approach. The concentration in this thesis will be on that part of the optimal-tension hypothesis that is different from the tension-reduction hypothesis, since the attempted reduction of tension to the desired tension level is similar to the attempted reduction of tension to zero. However, the attempt to increase tension to the optimum is quite different. The difference lies in two areas: the predictability of actions, and the actions and behaviors that would tend to disrupt the social group or system.

In the tension-reduction hypothesis the individual acting alone would always be expected to try to satisfy his needs, both primary (hunger, thirst) and secondary (learned), so that the tension level could be minimized overall. Since some needs are incompatible with others, there would always be some residual tension. When this hypothetical case is adjusted to take into account that man is social and lives in society, while the residual tension level may be seen as being higher than in the hypothetical case, it is in no way qualitatively

different. Prediction of individual behavior in a social situation, assuming that the social situation was well analyzed, is not problematic--if the situation has been relatively stable, the expectation would be that any individual action would in some way attempt to reduce overall tension levels. Only when the external environment changed would any problem arise, and even then only until a new low optimal tension level was achieved. While a given person's actual behavior would not be completely predictable, his behavior in a group would not be expected to deviate greatly from what was predicted by a researcher accepting the tension-reduction hypothesis because the overall balance would be expected to be maintained. This would lead the researcher not to examine other possibilities for the future behavior of group members. Clearly, if people are expected to act always in a certain way, barring external changes, there is no reason for a researcher to look into other possibilities unless external changes can be foreseen. Since many external changes are completely unpredictable, little projection of future possibilities would take place, except those implying a continuity of the status quo.

In the case of the optimal-tension hypothesis the model of stability can no longer be assumed to hold. In any relatively stable group there may be a discrepancy between an individual's current tension level and his characteristic optimal tension level for his point on the sleep-wakefulness cycle. Some may find the group level of tension too low, others may find it too high. The various members of a given group may have differing and incompatible personal needs from the group, beyond those common expectations which are the stated purposes of the group. In many cases the individual's task requirements in the group

may set a sufficiently high tension level for the individual in spite of the overall low tension level of the group. Alternatively, task allocation within the group may take into consideration differing tension requirements. In other situations, group pressures may exert a conforming influence on the members. It does not seem possible to predict when these mechanisms would operate successfully, or when the individual's need for a higher level of tension would impel him to create more stimulation. The sociologist using the tension-reduction hypothesis would call a person who creates a group disturbance a deviant and would not be able to explain his action, except with reference to other groups to which he belongs. The optimal-tension hypothesis would offer another possible explanation: that the individual needed more stimulation and created it by disrupting the group.

The predictions of the two different groups of sociologists, one using the tension-reduction hypothesis, the other the optimal-tension hypothesis, would also be quite different. The first group of sociologists would expect no disruptions unless external conditions change, or unless there are structural strains that make membership in the given group and another group incompatible. Sociologists using the optimal-tension hypothesis would, of course, predict group disruption because of structural changes or strain. But, in the absence of visible structural strains, equilibrium would not necessarily be expected to continue peacefully. At any time, a group member might find it necessary to create more stimulation by some sort of active manipulation of the environment, in some cases doing things incompatible with group norms and expectations. This may be a rare event in some groups, a more regular occurrence in others. It is important in that such a

disruption would be an expected event.

Once it is expected that disruption of a group might occur because of internal circumstances, the whole picture of the social system changes. Because of internal rather than external reasons, an individual or individuals may disrupt a group. The group may be able to contain the disruption, so that its effects would be felt only minimally if at all outside the group. But if the group cannot contain it, the disorder would affect other individuals and groups. There would most likely be an attempt to contain the outburst (e.g., by institutions such as the police) so that it did not spread. If it could not be contained, major institutions of the society could be toppled--as the result of purely internal causes.

In any stable group, the theorist using the optimal-tension hypothesis would expect that at any point internal disruptions may be too great to be contained within the group and may extend into the society. This means that in any analysis the theorist would be pre-disposed to take into account how a disruption in the group of interest could start and how it could reverberate throughout the rest of the society, as well as the mechanisms by which the disruption could be contained or not. This pre-disposition to expect disruption, as was the case with the conservative bias in the tension-reduction hypothesis, is not an inevitable implication from the hypothesis. However, it is the emphasis that is important. The optimal-tension hypothesis opens the possibility of internal disruption in an apparently stable society.

One example of an area in which this analysis would make a difference in research is in the examination of stable sub-cultures in a society. Such groups in North America as the Amish and the Mennonites

are usually examined with reference to the larger society as an example of a conflict of two cultures. It is either presumed or found that the sub-culture is relatively stable, all change being caused by the influence of the external culture and dissatisfied people leaving the sub-culture for the main one.¹⁷ The optimal-tension hypothesis might lead a researcher to expect that these sub-cultures, like every other society, might be disrupted from their own internal processes. Thus he might study the group with reference to its possible disruption, rather than as a stable enclave.¹⁸ Again, if the sub-culture breaks apart, it would be expected that this may have far-reaching effects on the larger society, and this, too, can be researched.

The role construct is central to structural-functional analysis.¹⁹ In the second chapter it was demonstrated that it produces a conservative bias in and of itself. The effects of the optimal-tension hypothesis on the role construct must now be considered.

The concept of role is not eliminated by the optimal-tension hypothesis. A person can still be conceptualized as being a member of many groups, and as choosing the groups which satisfy his basic needs. With the optimal-tension hypothesis, a person can be conceived of as choosing to be a member of those groups which habitually create the amount of stimulation that allows him to maintain his optimal activation level. In fact, the role explains why people fit into their groups fairly well, even though the possibility of group disruption seems so likely.

However, the fit cannot be perfect. Groups do change as people join and leave them. Further, a group member's activation level at a

specific meeting with a group need not always be the same. Since the activation level is influenced not only by the sleep-wakefulness cycle, but also by experiences that have preceded the specific time, a person who had been exposed to monotonous or restricted stimulation just prior to meeting the group would then have a need for increased stimulation.²⁰ His choices at this point would be varied. He could break his habit and stay away from the group. But he may not want to if either his commitment is high or the group sanctions against missing a meeting are severe. So, should he attend the meeting, there is a possibility of his disrupting it in order to raise the level of environmental stimulation.

It can be seen in the above argument that role, when combined with the optimal-tension hypothesis, still is a conservative influence. It does suggest to the researcher that insofar as the individual has choice, it is far less likely that he will disrupt a group. However, the optimal-tension hypothesis has already led to the assumption that disruption of a group is a distinct possibility. Combining the role construct with the optimal-tension hypothesis seems to have some power to explain apparent social stability. Very small disruptions of groups in a stable society are quite common. These kinds of small disruptions are immediately repaired either by group sanctions or by being ignored. Such acts as a person's telling an off-color joke in a mixed semi-formal group, or one individual's heckling a speaker are common but cause little damage beyond a slight immediate anxiety.²¹

More extreme disruptions are much rarer. Most are attributable to inter-group strain, to incompatible reference groups, and the like. The optimal-tension hypothesis predicts that there is still a residue

that cannot be explained in this way; for example, one source of this residue can be changes in individual needs for stimulation. The optimal-tension hypothesis predicts that disruptions should happen, but the role construct would lead the researcher to expect them to happen rarely. The reason that very small disruptions would happen much more often is that the person would ordinarily require only slightly more stimulation than normal when he goes to the group.

The combination of the optimal-tension hypothesis and the role construct would seem to be most appropriate for structural-functional analysis. By its nature as expressed in Merton's paradigm, as well as by other theorists, structural-functional analysis seems to be inclined to examining groups and societies which are functioning to some extent. In fact, the very act of focusing on a group or society implies that the researcher thinks that it has some kind of structure. A possible problem in Parsons is that the researcher will assume that the structure is immutable and will not look ahead to a time when the system he is examining might cease to exist. The optimal-tension hypothesis makes it apparent that the continued survival of the system is a question that always should be examined.

CHAPTER V

EXAMPLES OF APPLICATION

The advantages of the optimal-tension hypothesis over the tension-reduction hypothesis were examined in the last chapter. The optimal-tension hypothesis leads to researcher to expect that disruption may occur in a relatively stable group from internal processes alone. This has two effects: he will have an additional source for the explanation of disruption, and he will, at times, anticipate disruption of a group or society, even when there are no apparent internal strains.

This chapter will attempt to show how using the optimal-tension hypothesis changes structural-functional sociology. First the changes that can be made in Merton's "A Paradigm for Functional Analysis in Sociology" will be examined. Then the paradigm will be used to analyze an example of an empirical study from a functionalist perspective. The differences that a change in the psychological assumption might have made for the form and conclusions of the study will be analyzed.

Merton's paradigm will be examined since it is the best codification of functional analysis that has yet appeared. Because it is sufficiently complete, it will be possible to show the changes that the adoption of an optimal-tension personality hypothesis would require in the paradigm. In the examination of the paradigm, only those sections (2, 3, and 6) will be rewritten that require changing because of the analysis of the previous chapters.

The analysis of each of the three sections will begin with a restatement of that section, followed by an explanation of the reasons for the changes.

Revisions to "A Paradigm for Functional Analysis in Sociology"

2. Concepts of subjective dispositions (motives, purposes)

Any sociological analysis must make explicit its personality assumptions if it is not to bias its conclusions with logic that is implicit in the analysis. All analyses may reflect individual motives at some point; therefore all analyses should make these explicit so that the reader is able to judge what effect, if any, these assumptions had on the results of the analysis.

A conception of individual motivation which seems to have some empirical support in psychology is the optimal-tension hypothesis, as outlined above, and this hypothesis may be explicitly formulated as a postulate. Should another conception of individual motivation receive empirical support in the future, it could be used in place of the optimal-tension hypothesis, if made explicit.

These concepts of subjective disposition should be kept distinct from the related, but different, concepts of objective consequences of attitude, belief, and behavior.

BASIC QUERY: In which types of analysis is it sufficient to take observed motivations as data, as given, and in which are they properly considered as problematical, as derivable from other data?

The change in this section stems from the need to make explicit one's personality assumptions. The optimal-tension hypothesis is proposed as a postulate with support in psychology.

3. Concepts of objective consequences (functions, dysfunctions)

Two prevailing types of confusion enveloping the several current conceptions of "function" are:

(1) The tendency to confine sociological observations to the positive contributions of a sociological item to the social or cultural system in which it is implicated; and

(2) The tendency to confuse the subjective category of motive with the objective category of function.

Appropriate conceptual distinctions are required to eliminate these confusions.

The first problem calls for a concept of multiple consequences and a net balance of an aggregate of consequences.

Functions are those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system; and dysfunctions, those observed consequences which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system. There is also the empirical possibility of nonfunctional

consequences, which are simply irrelevant to the system under consideration.

In any given instance, an item may have both functional and dysfunctional consequences, giving rise to the difficult and important problem of evolving canons for assessing the net balance of the aggregate of consequences. (This is, of course, most important in the use of functional analysis for guiding the formation and enactment of policy.)

The second problem (arising from the easy confusion of motives and functions) requires us to introduce a conceptual distinction between the cases in which the subjective aim-in-view coincides with the objective consequences--manifest consequences--and the cases in which they diverge--latent consequences.

There is thus a six part typology of manifest and latent vs. functions, dysfunctions, and nonfunctions:

manifest functions	latent functions
manifest dysfunctions	latent dysfunctions
manifest nonfunctions	latent nonfunctions

BASIC QUERY: What are the effects of the transformation of a previously latent function into a manifest function (involving the problem of the role of knowledge in human behavior and the problems of "manipulation" of human behavior)?

The change in this section makes explicit the implied ideas of manifest dysfunctions and nonfunctions. It seems possible that there would be cases of group members consciously attempting to destroy the groups of which they are a part (manifest dysfunctions), although these would probably be rare cases. It seems best to make clear that manifest dysfunctions are empirically possible and to judge, at the conclusion of analysis, whether there were any cases of them. The optimal-tension hypothesis would imply that such cases could occur, and the changes in the paradigm attempt to make this explicit.²

6. Concepts of the mechanisms through which functions are fulfilled

Functional analysis in sociology, as in other disciplines such as physiology and psychology, calls for a "concrete and detailed" account of the mechanisms which operate to perform a designated function. This refers to mechanisms discovered in all the social sciences, but as sociologists we must emphasize the social mechanisms (e.g., role-assignment, insulation of institutional demands, hierarchic ordering of values, social division of labor, ritual and ceremonial enactments, etc.). We must try to make the list of social mechanisms as complete as possible, always leaving open the possibility that our list is incomplete. The social sciences are complementary to each other,

we must also consider the mechanisms found by the other disciplines in our sociological functional explanations.

BASIC QUERY: What is the presently available inventory of social mechanisms corresponding, say, to the large inventory of psychological mechanisms? What methodological problems are entailed in discerning the operation of these social mechanisms?

The changes made here are an attempt to remove the artificial distinctions that Merton makes between sociology and the other social science disciplines. In many cases mechanisms found by other disciplines may explain or partially explain the fulfilling of social functions. Other disciplines with possible sources of functions are psychology, political science, economics, etc. Consideration of mechanisms found by other disciplines does not imply, of course, that for any given problem there will be suitable mechanisms found in another discipline.³

A Research Example

An empirical example will be examined to show some of the advantages of assuming the optimal-tension hypothesis rather than the tension-reduction hypothesis. First the research will be examined in terms of Merton's paradigm to show that it can, in fact, be viewed as a study from a functionalist perspective. Then it will be analyzed with reference to the psychological assumptions. No attempt will be made to include references to material not bearing on the personality assumptions or their effects. Whether other criticisms can be made of the study, and whether the research as it stands is a significant contribution to sociology, are not touched on in the analysis.

The research article chosen is "Patterns of Sex-Union Formation in Barbados" by G. Edward Ebanks, P. M. George, and Charles E. Nobbs.⁴ Although the authors do not explicitly base their research on struc-

tural-functional theory, and their vocabulary differs somewhat from that in Merton's paradigm, the study can be classified as taking a functionalist perspective because it fulfills Merton's conditions for functional analysis. This will be seen below when the study is analyzed using the sections of Merton's paradigm. This analysis necessitates a certain amount of change in vocabulary, which will be pointed out in each case, but the vocabulary is not distorted in the changes, nor are the authors' emphases changed.⁵

The main purposes of the research seem to be four-fold: (1) to argue against the theory that the predominant pattern of sex-union formation in Barbados goes from visiting to commonlaw to marriage; (2) to elucidate the actual patterns of sex-union formation in some detail; (3) to compare the patterns over three age cohorts; and (4) to compare their findings with data gathered in Jamaica fifteen years before. The article ends with a few implications for fertility patterns, which the authors say will be examined elsewhere in detail.

The first task is to examine this research with reference to Merton's paradigm. Under each of the sections of the paradigm, examples from the article, if any, will be listed. Where many examples are pertinent, only a few of the more prominent will be listed.

1. The item(s) to which functions are imputed

As can be seen from the main purposes of the research, patterns of sex-union formation are central to the study. The authors discuss them as patterns, and so they clearly fit into Merton's "standardized (i.e., patterned and repetitive) items."⁶ Additionally, within both commonlaw and marriage sex-union patterns, "role requirements" are

distinguished for each of the partners.⁷ Social roles are among Merton's list of examples of standardized items.⁸

The final conclusion lists three specific patterns found: (1) most partnerships begin and end in the visiting state; (2) women spend a long period of time in the visiting state during their reproductive life; and (3) there are substantial time lapses between unions. The authors state that these three patterns have "implications" for fertility, which will be examined elsewhere.⁹ The discovery of the patterns discussed in this article is a preliminary step in the discovery of the effects of the patterns on fertility. Since fertility refers to the pattern of births, the "implications" of sex-union patterns for birth patterns can be expressed in Merton's terminology as the function or dysfunction of the discovered sex-union patterns for the decrease in the pattern of births.¹⁰

2. Concepts of subjective dispositions (motives, purposes)

Although never stated explicitly, the personality assumption used by the researchers is the tension-reduction hypothesis. The article is concerned specifically with data gathered from women, since only they were interviewed.¹¹ Therefore this analysis will deal with the personality assumption implicit in their discussion of women's behavior.

The individual motivation involved in the tension-reduction hypothesis is the attempt on the part of the individual to reduce his tension level to zero (or to as low a level as possible). In order to demonstrate that the authors use the tension-reduction hypothesis, it is necessary to show that (1) individual subjective dispositions are

referred to in the article; (2) the reference to them in the case of women is always in terms of the attempt to satisfy them; and (3) no mention is made that women ever act so as to deliberately not satisfy them. If all three conditions are met, they can be taken as indicative that the authors assume the tension-reduction hypothesis.

Women's individual subjective dispositions that are referred to in the article are prestige, self-esteem, security, and sex-gratification.¹² Security is the most central because it is named as the main reason for the seeking of marriage, with prestige and self-esteem as subsidiary reasons.¹³ Since the individual voluntarily enters into marriage, the reasons for entering into it can be seen as subjective dispositions (motives).

References are made twice, in the introduction and in the conclusion, to marriage as a major goal of women.¹⁴ Other references to marriage call it the most stable kind of union, and other kinds of union are referred to as less stable than marriage.¹⁵ The only reasons given in the article that lead one to expect that marriage would be entered into and would be stable are (1) the women's subjective dispositions, especially the motive of security; and (2) the insurance of the legal rights of the spouse and children in property transmission.¹⁶ The motive of security explains the women wanting to insure property transmission for themselves and their children. Security is the only motive offered to explain the wish for marriage and, with it, the insurance of property transmission, and it seems to explain the apparent stability of marriage. Therefore it seems reasonable to conclude that the authors were satisfied with the explanation that the women's motivation for security caused them to seek to enter into marriage and to

remain in it, thereby making the marriage state more stable than the other forms of sex-union. That no more secure situation for a woman than marriage is mentioned implies that it is the most secure situation possible in that culture. In addition, there is no mention made that women ever seek to reduce the security of their marriage union.

The three conditions for demonstrating the tension-reduction hypothesis have been met: that subjective dispositions are present, that women consistently seek to satisfy them, and that they never act so as to deliberately not satisfy them. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that the authors assume that individual motivation is explained by the tension-reduction hypothesis.

3. Concepts of objective consequences (functions, dysfunctions)

Many objective consequences of items are mentioned. Since the vocabulary of the article is different, however, from Merton's paradigm, the original statement will be listed and then it will be put into the vocabulary of the paradigm.

The sex-union patterns are central to the article, and many of their consequences are suggested. For example, "it is only under the condition of marriage that the property rights of the conjugal partner and children can be legally insured."¹⁷ This statement implies that one consequence of marriage is the transfer of property rights through legal processes. This is equivalent to saying that a function (manifest or latent) of marriage is the insurance of property rights through legal processes.

The statement, "it is also possible that commonlaw unions are the intentional and unintentional compromise between the sexes,"¹⁸ can

easily be translated into the terminology of the paradigm as: a possible function, both manifest (intentional) and latent (unintentional), of commonlaw unions is a compromise between the sexes.

A result of the commonlaw union can be interpreted as a latent dysfunction. The birth of a child cements the visiting partners into a commonlaw relation, but creates poverty because of the presence of more mouths to feed. The financial strains can lead to frictions and the dissolution of the commonlaw relation.¹⁹ Since it was stated that the birth of a child cements the commonlaw union, its dissolution is a consequence, and apparently an unintended one, on the part of the partners. The birth of a child along with economic deprivation can be said to have the eventual latent dysfunction of making the commonlaw union more likely to dissolve.

No examples of manifest dysfunction appear in the article.

4. Concepts of the unit subserved by the function

The examples from section 3 will be used here in the terminology of the paradigm.

In the first example, marriage has a manifest function of insuring property rights. The unit subserved by the function is the family (after a spouse dies or in some other way leaves the marriage).

In the second example commonlaw has the possible manifest and latent function of being a compromise between the sexes. The units subserved by the function are the participants in these commonlaw relationships, that is, the individual men and women.

The third example states that the birth of a child makes the commonlaw union subsequently more likely to break up. The unit subserved by the function is the commonlaw relation itself, since it is

more likely to break up after the birth of a child.

5. Concepts of functional requirements (needs, prerequisites)

No specific items are listed directly as functional requirements in the article.

6. Concepts of the mechanisms through which functions are fulfilled

Transmission of property is fulfilled through marriage and legal enactments.²⁰

Sanctions for role fulfillment in marriage are created by legal enactments (prison and termination of support).²¹

7. Concepts of functional alternatives (functional equivalents or substitutes)

Functional alternatives for the fulfillment of sexual desires are all three of the sex-union patterns: visiting, commonlaw, and marriage.²²

Functional alternatives for the raising of children are the commonlaw and the marriage relations.²³ However, because marriage is presumed to be stable and it is stated that children bring financial strain and therefore instability to the commonlaw relation, they are not equivalent in the sense of being presumed to be stable situations for the raising of children.

8. Concepts of structural context (or structural constraint)

The poverty of the people is the main concept of structural constraint that is stated. For example, "the precarious nature of employment coupled with low earning power of poorly educated males virtually precludes the possibility of early marriage among lower class

Negroes in Barbadian society."²⁴

9. Concepts of dynamics and change

The authors make a comparison with a study of the same kind done in Jamaica 15 years previously.²⁵ Reference is also made to the social changes in Barbados in the last 20 years, and an indirect attempt is made to examine the effect of these changes on sex-union formation, by an analysis of age cohorts.²⁶

10. Problems of validation of functional analysis

The authors do a comparative analysis with the 15 year old Jamaican data and their data on Barbados. The patterns of sex-union formation are found to be similar.²⁷

11. Problems of the ideological implications of functional analysis

These problems are not discussed in the article.

From the above analysis, it is clear that the article's approach takes a functionalist perspective as defined by the paradigm. While two of the sections of the paradigm were not found to have referents in the article (sections 5 and 11), the statements in the article were translated easily into the terminology of the other nine sections of the paradigm; and this did not entail any change in the article's emphases.

The next step is an analysis of the article centering around the tension-reduction hypothesis, and an examination of the effects of the replacement of that assumption by the optimal-tension hypothesis.

One effect of the tension-reduction hypothesis is visible in

the authors' treatment of change. In Chapter II it was shown that assuming the tension-reduction hypothesis predisposes the researcher to look for causes of change only in external sources. All the causes listed as sources for change in sex-union formation are clearly external to the sex-unions and may even be attributable to causes external to Barbados: (1) diversification of a single crop economy, (2) rapid urbanization, (3) substantial improvements in educational attainment and in levels of health, and (4) the inauguration and implementation of an effective nationwide family-planning program.²⁸ With the optimal-tension hypothesis, change could be expected to result from inter-nal as well as from external causes, or from their interaction.

The tension-reduction hypothesis appears, further, to lead the authors to an incorrect conclusion in their summary: "It has been established that women typically do not retrogress to a less stable type of union either within or between partnerships."²⁹ Within partnerships, this statement is valid, as shown in Table II, where only about 23 out of 6908 unions are omitted from the table because they involved reversals to a less stable union type.³⁰ But the statement that there is typically no "retrogression" between partnerships is not at all supported by the data, as is clear from Table III.³¹ From the table, if partnership 1 ended as married, there was retrogression in 97.3% of the cases. If it ended as commonlaw, retrogression occurred in 73.9% of the cases. After partnership 2, the equivalent figures are 100% and 67.6%; after partnership 3, 50% and 77.8%. In most cases, the unions begin as visiting, which, according to the authors' formulation, is the least stable type of relationship. This is the case

regardless of whether the previous union terminated as visiting, as commonlaw, or as married. The authors conclude that women desire marriage above all for stability: "When there is a change in union status it is in the direction of a more stable union type, thereby lending support to the contention that the goal of most women is to become married."³² The idea that women would not revert to a less stable type of union, either within or between partnerships, is consistent with the tension-reduction hypothesis. That the data do not allow for such a conclusion between partnerships is ignored.³³

If the optimal-tension hypothesis were used in place of the tension-reduction hypothesis, the bias of assuming continual movement toward stability on the part of all women would be avoided. An example of the change in analysis with the optimal-tension hypothesis can be created starting with the assumption that marriage does bring stability and therefore a reduction in tension. With the optimal-tension hypothesis, it would be expected that not all women would find the lower tension level optimal, and some would therefore seek an increase in stimulation from the level they would have in marriage. This then would be a possible explanation for why commonlaw and marriage partnerships are terminated and the next partnership begins as visiting, which was the finding that the authors of this study had difficulty integrating into their conclusions.

To this point the analysis has focused on the findings of the authors of the study and how they were biased by the tension-reduction hypothesis. To turn to how the optimal-tension hypothesis would lead to a different type of analysis of the data, it follows from the argument in the previous paragraph that it would be of interest to focus on

terminated relationships--particularly on terminated marriages, since marriage is reputed to be an important goal. The authors of the study do not consider in their analysis the data on terminated marriages; in fact, they say that "it would seem unlikely that many partnerships would terminate as married unions."³⁴ But, according to the authors' data, fully 15% of all present and past marriages have been terminated,³⁵ suggesting that it would be an important area of examination. Perhaps terminated marriages were not investigated because they would be difficult to explain under the tension-reduction hypothesis. With the optimal-tension hypothesis, a possible reason for terminating marriage was stated above: that marriage may be too stable (too tension-reducing) a union for some couples. Such an explanation would, of course, be impossible with the tension-reduction hypothesis.

Aside from its intrinsic interest as a problem to be investigated, examining terminated marriages might have provided some data for the purpose of the authors' overall study, that of investigating fertility declines.³⁶ Instability of marriage seems a logical topic for study of fertility declines. The authors' use of the tension-reduction hypothesis apparently led them to overlook this area, but a researcher using the optimal-tension hypothesis would be likely to focus on it.

When the data on terminated marriages is investigated in the tables provided in the article, a possible pattern of an increase in stability of marriages is found. In the cohort group of 40-50 year-olds, 24.9% of the marriages have been terminated; in the 30-39 year-old group, 12.7% of the marriages have been terminated; and in the youngest group, the 15-29 year-olds, 5.6% of the marriages have been

terminated.³⁷ Clearly the data do not allow for a definite statement that marriages are less likely to end among the young Barbadian women, since they may terminate their marriages at a later date. But if from further investigation the researcher did come to the conclusion that marriages were currently showing a pattern of greater stability, the optimal-tension hypothesis would allow for an explanation: because of modernization, the number of groups of which an individual can be a member is increased, leading to increased role choice. An individual has more opportunity to join groups to provide him with his optimal level of stimulation, his or her marriage being only one of these groups. To the extent that individuals actually make use of the increased opportunity to join groups, then one could expect a decreased possibility of a group being disrupted from within, including the marriage.

In this chapter, sections of Merton's paradigm were rewritten to reflect the change from the tension-reduction hypothesis to the optimal-tension hypothesis. Then a recent study was analyzed to provide an empirical example of the biasing effects of the tension-reduction hypothesis and the advantages of the optimal-tension hypothesis.

Because the study fits well into Merton's paradigm, it can be said to take a functionalist perspective as defined by the paradigm. The tension-reduction hypothesis is not explicitly stated as a postulate by the authors, but their emphasis on motives and particularly on the stability of marriage suggests that it is their implicit assumption.

In the study chosen the biasing effects of the tension-reduction hypothesis can be seen in the authors' searching for change in

only external causes, and in their error in stating that women do not move to a "less stable" form of union between partnerships. With the optimal-tension hypothesis instead, internal as well as external causes for change would be sought. The error in assessing movement between partnerships would probably not be made if the optimal-tension hypothesis were used, because there would be no reason not to expect the type of pattern that was actually found.

Further, using the optimal-tension hypothesis would lead to an interest in problems that were not pursued using the tension-reduction hypothesis, such as the termination of marriages. Not only are terminations fairly frequent, but an investigation of them also might have shed light on fertility declines, the authors' main purpose in doing the study. When marriage terminations are analyzed, a possible pattern of increasing stability is found which, if further research bore it out, could be explained using the optimal-tension hypothesis.

The conclusion from examining an empirical study with both hypotheses is that the optimal-tension hypothesis allows the researcher to avoid some biases that follow from the tension-reduction hypothesis, without sacrificing any explanatory power for the empirical relationships found.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

This essay has examined the effects of two different personality assumptions on sociological structural-functional analysis. The first, the tension-reduction hypothesis, predisposes the researcher to the conservative bias of expecting no internal disruption in a seemingly stable group or society. The other, the optimal-tension hypothesis, leads the researcher to expect that at any moment the social fabric of a group might be disrupted from within. Because he expects change from within, he would look for possible areas and mechanisms of change, rather than promoting the status quo by assuming that it will continue.

The role construct, when used with the tension-reduction hypothesis, reinforces the conservative bias. When used with the optimal-tension hypothesis, it seems to be a good source of explanation as to why groups are not continually disrupted by their members. In effect, the role construct retains a conservative bias in itself, but in combination with the optimal-tension hypothesis, it establishes an expectation between constant disruptions and complete internal stability.

As an example of how the tension-reduction hypothesis creates a bias, Talcott Parsons' theories were examined. Parsons was chosen because of his leading position in structural-functional sociology and because of the clarity of his use of the hypothesis. In comparing

his early and later formulations, it was possible to show the manner in which tension-reduction personality content added to a seemingly-neutral theoretical structure can give the whole structure a conservative bias.

While it might have been ideal to replace Parsons' tension-reduction assumption with the optimal-tension hypothesis and then work through the changes that would ensue in his theories, this was not done for two reasons: (1) Parsons' theories do not lend themselves to replacing his psychological assumption with another because many of his major theoretical constructs do not follow directly from his psychological assumption, and, therefore, other theoretical changes would not have followed easily; and (2) using a more empirical work was a clearer way of showing the difference between the two assumptions.

Therefore, an article on "Patterns of Sex-Union Formation in Barbados" was used as an example of the effects of a change from the tension-reduction hypothesis to the optimal-tension hypothesis. The article was analyzed by using Merton's "A Paradigm for Functional Analysis in Sociology," which is the clearest codification of functionalism. First, changes were made in the paradigm to reflect the change in the personality assumption and the other findings of the thesis, and then the research article was examined through the categories of the paradigm. Finally, the study was analyzed with reference to the psychological assumptions. In the analysis of the article, it was found that the tension-reduction hypothesis led to biases in the research process and analysis, and that the optimal-tension hypothesis would likely have avoided these problems.

This examination of personality assumptions has intended to show that, while sociology is an independent discipline with its own theories and history, it is not isolated from the other social sciences. In this case the psychological assumptions that usually have the status of postulates in sociology have been examined with reference to structural-functional theory, and the effects that they have were shown.

The conclusion to be drawn from this study is not that psychological reductionism is the only appropriate way to approach sociological problems. Rather, it is that the psychological assumptions contained in sociological theories and research must be made explicit to avoid unintended consequences from implicit psychological assumptions. If the optimal-tension hypothesis is used as a personality assumption, it may introduce biases as well. Thus it, too, should be made explicit so that its biases in a given research can be easily traced. The emphasis in this thesis was on psychological assumptions because they are relevant to social action, and are therefore clearly among the most important assumptions that bear on sociology.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

1. See Emile Durkheim, The Rules of the Sociological Method (New York: The Free Press, 1964), for a clear statement of the need to examine social facts rather than psychological facts to make sociological explanations. An example of sociological research on these principles is his Suicide (New York: The Free Press, 1951).

2. See Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (Enl. ed.; New York: The Free Press, 1968), for essays that take the approach of Durkheim, especially the essays on anomie. Merton also owes a debt to Weber, which comes out in Part III of that book.

3. See George C. Homans, The Nature of Social Science (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1967), for a complete statement of his views on this subject.

4. Ibid., p. 64. This particular statement applies most clearly to Parsons among all structural-functionalists.

5. Ibid., p. 69.

6. Chris Argyris, "Personality and Organization Theory Revisited," Administrative Science Quarterly, XVIII (1973); pp. 141-67.

7. Ibid., p. 157.

8. Ibid., p. 160.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., pp. 160-61.

11. This is clear from Robert W. Friedrichs, A Sociology of Sociology (New York: The Free Press, 1972), in his discussion of "Paradigmatic Consolidation," pp. 11-23.

12. Examples of accusations of a conservative bias in structural-functionalism can be found in Merton, pp. 79-100; throughout N. J. Demerath & Richard A. Peterson (eds.), Systems, Change, and Conflict (New York: The Free Press, 1967), especially pp. 261-311; and in Ralf Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1959), especially pp. 120-23 & 167-83. "Conservative bias" will be defined below.

13. See Merton, pp. 91-100, for an example of such a statement.
14. Friedrichs, pp. 14-15.
15. Merton, pp. 104-108. The paradigm is reproduced in the Appendix.
16. Ernest Nagel, The Structure of Science (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1961), pp. 522-26.
17. Merton, pp. 74-79.
18. Talcott Parsons, The Structure of Social Action (2 vols.; paperback ed.; New York: The Free Press, 1968); Talcott Parsons & Edward A. Shils (eds.), Toward a General Theory of Action (New York: Harper & Row, 1962). Parsons' importance is made clear by Friedrichs, p. 13.
19. For a discussion of pattern variables see Talcott Parsons, The Social System (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1951), pp. 58-88.
20. Merton, pp. 104-108.

Chapter II

1. This is not to say that the only source of conservative bias is the personality assumption. It is, however, one of the more important sources.

2. This model is related to drive reduction theory in psychology. The most famous proponent of this theory in modern psychology is Hull. See, for example, Clark L. Hull, Principles of Behavior (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1943). Freud's theory is also related to drive reduction theory. See Sigmund Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis (New York: Washington Square Press, 1952). Parsons' use of this assumption is examined in Chapter III, below.

3. Role is being used here from the viewpoint of how it divides the whole person into segments that fill various status-positions. This approach to role is consistent with the examination of personality assumptions because personality assumptions are about the whole person, not just a segment. Another approach to role is an emphasis on the status-position and the various demands made on it. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (Enl. ed.; New York: The Free Press, 1968), pp. 422 ff., emphasizes this aspect in his discussion of role-sets, and Neal Gross, Ward S. Mason, & Alexander W. McEachern, Explorations in Role Analysis (New York: Wiley, 1958), have examined the conflicting demands made on the status-position of school superintendent. However, this second kind of approach to the role concept would add another level of complexity to an already complex analysis.

4. The use of the word "considers" may imply a conscious thought by members of a group. However, conscious consideration is not neces-

sarily required; unconscious consideration would serve the same function. Consciousness is implied only to make the mechanisms more clear.

Chapter III

1. Talcott Parsons, The Structure of Social Action (2 vols.; paperback ed.; New York: The Free Press, 1968).

2. See Talcott Parsons, "An Approach to Psychological Theory in Terms of the Theory of Action," in Sigmund Koch (ed.), Psychology: A Study of a Science, III: Formulations of the Person and the Social Context (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), especially pp. 619-27. L. J. Henderson, the Harvard biologist, is also acknowledged, but his influence mostly entailed pointing Parsons toward Pareto.

3. This distinction is made by Don Martindale, The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960).

4. Parsons, Structure . . . , p. 44.

5. Ibid., p. 719.

6. Ibid., pp. 634-35.

7. Ibid., p. 642.

8. Ibid., p. 745.

9. Edward C. Devereux, Jr., "Parsons' Sociological Theory," in Max Black (ed.), The Social Theories of Talcott Parsons (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961), pp. 33 ff.

10. In the following discussion the emphasis will be on the internal dynamics of personality and how the personality is fitted into the social system through the role construct. The process of socialization will scarcely be touched on because it is not relevant to the structural model of personality. Socialization is the means by which a child acquires the common symbol system (or cultural system) of his society (Talcott Parsons, Robert F. Bales, & Edward A. Shils, Working Papers in the Theory of Action Glencoe, Ill.: [The Free Press, 1953], p. 17). This aspect of personality is not important for our purposes. That individuals live in society and have to adjust themselves to specific conditions is the only information we need. The detailed process that is developed by Parsons is simply an amplification of his basic postulates of personality.

11. Parsons, Structure . . . , p. viii.

12. Ibid., pp. 385, 388.

13. Talcott Parsons & Edward A. Shils (eds.), Toward a General Theory of Action (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 9.

14. Sigmund Freud, The Ego and the Id (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), p. 15.

15. Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle (New York: Bantam Books, 1959), p. 63.

16. Calvin S. Hall, A Primer of Freudian Psychology (New York: New American Library, 1954), p. 22.

17. Parsons & Shils, p. 9.

18. Ibid., p. 115.

19. Ibid., p. 10.

20. Ibid., p. 14.

21. Ibid., pp. 113-14.

22. Ibid., p. 114.

23. Ibid., p. 121.

24. Ibid., pp. 132-33.

25. Sigmund Freud, "Formulation Regarding the Two Principles in Mental Functioning," in Collected Papers, IV (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), p. 18.

26. Freud, Beyond, p. 26.

27. Freud, Ego & Id, pp. 46-49; Hall, p. 52.

28. Hall, pp. 121-22.

29. Ralf Dahrendorf, "Out of Utopia: Toward a Reorientation of Sociological Analysis," American Journal of Sociology, LXIV (1958), pp. 115-27.

30. Parsons & Shils, p. 7.

31. Ibid., p. 120.

32. Talcott Parsons & Robert F. Bales, Family, Socialization, and Interaction Process (New York: The Free Press, 1955), p. 141.

33. Parsons & Shils, p. 122.

34. Parsons et al., p. 212.

35. Ibid.

36. Parsons & Shils, p. 128.

37. Ibid., p. 146.

38. Parsons et al., p. 214, italics mine.

39. Ibid., pp. 102-103

40. "During periods of suspension of interaction, there exists the imperative, if the system is to be renewed, for the motivational and cultural patterns to be maintained. During this period, they may be said to be in a state of latency." (ibid., p. 185).

41. "The adaptive phase is characterized by the attempt to secure facilities through cognition and manipulation," (Jesse R. Pitts, "Introduction to Part III: Personality and the Social System," in Talcott Parsons et al. [eds.], Theories of Society [New York: The Free Press, 1963], p. 696.)

42. "There is a single-minded concentration on effective securing of the goal." (ibid.)

43. Parsons et al., Working Papers . . ., p. 225.

44. Parsons & Shils, p. 23.

45. Parsons & Bales, p. 156.

46. Ibid., p. 167.

47. Parsons & Shils, p. 24.

48. Ibid., p. 153.

49. Ibid., p. 197.

50. Parsons et al., Working Papers . . ., p. 238.

51. See Andrew Hacker, "Sociology and Ideology," in Black, pp. 309-10. As Hacker points out, Parsons' liberal politics (in addition to his conservative sociology) can be looked at as actually a conservative doctrine, "as can American liberalism in general."

Chapter IV

1. Since a completely value-free sociology is unlikely, removing the conservative bias opens the door for other biases. The investigation of the biases that the new personality assumption brings into sociology would be a fruitful topic for another research paper.

2. See Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (Enl. ed.; New York: The Free Press, 1968), pp. 104-108. The paradigm is reproduced in the Appendix.

3. See Clarence Leuba, "Toward Some Integration of Learning Theories: The Concept of Optimal Stimulation," Psychological Reports, I (1955), pp. 27-33; and D. O. Hebb & W. R. Thompson, "The Social Significance of Animal Studies," in Gardner Lindzey (ed.), Handbook of Social Psychology, I (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1954), pp. 551-52.

4. Robert W. White, "Motivation Reconsidered: The Concept of Competence," Psychological Review, LXVI (1960), pp. 297-333; Harry Fowler, Curiosity and Exploratory Behavior (New York: MacMillan, 1965).

5. White, p. 330.

6. D. E. Berlyne, Conflict, Arousal, and Curiosity (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), p. 194.

7. Paul McReynolds, "A Restricted Conceptualization of Human Anxiety," Psychological Reports, II (1956), Monograph Supplement VI, pp. 293-312.

8. Donald W. Fiske & Salvatore R. Maddi (eds.), Functions of Varied Experience (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1961), Chap. II.

9. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

10. Ibid., p. 31.

11. Ibid., p. 35.

12. Ibid., p. 38.

13. Ibid., p. 42.

14. Ibid., p. 45.

15. Ibid., p. 46.

16. Ibid., Chap. V.

17. For an example of such structural-functional research on the Amish see Charles P. Loomis, "The Old Order Amish as a Social System," in Social Systems: Essays on Their Persistence and Change (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1960), pp. 212-48.

18. The fact that structural-functionalists examine pattern maintenance mechanisms in societies does not imply the same thing as what is expressed above. Pattern-maintenance mechanisms are examined with reference to disruptive strains that are visible to the researcher. The optimal-tension hypothesis would lead the researcher to expect additional disruptions to stem from strains that are not manifest, but that are newly created in interpersonal interactions.

19. See Barton, p. 104. Section 1 of his paradigm clearly shows the centrality of role.

20. Fiske & Maddi, Chap. V.

21. What a small disruption is depends on the expectations in the society. The examples noted would be small disruptions in an American urban group. These would be major group disruptions in some societies. See, for example, Clifford Geertz, The Religion of Java (New York: The Free Press, 1960), pp. 227-60, for a discussion of such a society.

Chapter V

1. Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (Enl. ed.; New York: The Free Press, 1968), pp. 104-108. The entire paradigm is reproduced in the Appendix.

2. It is possible to define "group membership" so that anyone who is trying to destroy a group is not a member of it. However, this might leave a person who is living in a group, isolated from all other groups, as a member of no group, even though he receives nurturance from the group he is living in. I prefer to call this person a member of the group.

3. Although the conceptualization of problems in sociology may be different from that of other disciplines, it does not preclude looking to psychology, political science, economics, etc., for explanations or partial explanations that may be recast in sociological terms. Further, it is possible that in the future the conceptualization of problems in these disciplines may become more homogeneous.

4. Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, XI (1974), pp. 230-46.

5. The specific area of research in the article is "patterns of sex-union formation." The latter is divided by the authors into three patterns: visiting, commonlaw, and marriage. Visiting is similar to what we would, in North America, call dating, in that the partners do not cohabit, except that sexual relations are part of the definition of visiting. A partnership is said to be commonlaw when the couple lives together without a wedding, often in the house of the woman's parents. Marriage, similar to North American marriage, includes a church wedding and generally the purchase of a house, and is a legally sanctioned union (*ibid.*, pp. 230-32).

Fertility is referred to as a "pattern" below, as well. This entails an assumption that follows from the authors' statement that the main thrust of the study is on fertility declines (*ibid.*, p. 232, n. 2). Since the study of "fertility declines" refers to fertility rates in the population, it seems not to be a distortion to talk of fertility "patterns."

The manner in which patterns are used in this thesis, and the manner in which functions are imputed to them, in no way implies that the authors, themselves, would agree that their study fits into Merton's paradigm.

6. Merton, p. 104.
7. Ebanks et al., pp. 231-32.
8. Merton, p. 104.
9. Ebanks et al., p. 245.
10. The authors state that the major thrust of the investigation was to explain fertility declines; ibid., p. 232, n. 2.
11. Ibid., p. 231.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., pp. 231, 245.
15. Ibid., pp. 234, 235, 238, 239, 243, 245.
16. Ibid., p. 231.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 245.
19. Ibid., p. 232.
20. Ibid., p. 231.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., pp. 231-32. While the opportunity for sexual gratification is explicitly mentioned only for the visiting union, the fact that the authors do not state that commonlaw and marriage are different in this respect in Barbados than in North American culture implies strongly that sexual gratification is a part of the latter two unions as well.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., p. 231.
25. Ibid., pp. 243-45.
26. Ibid., pp. 242-43.
27. Ibid., p. 245.
28. Ibid., p. 242.
29. Ibid., p. 245. "Retrogress" and "retrogression" as used by

the authors imply a change to a less stable union type. This is the sense in which the words will be used below.

30. Ibid., p. 236, in the second note to the table.

31. Ibid., p. 237.

32. Ibid., p. 245.

33. The fact that most unions do begin with the visiting state is acknowledged elsewhere in the paragraph--"Most partnerships begin and end as visiting unions. . ." (p. 245). But the fact that the error comes in the first (more general) sentence of the paragraph shows that the authors emphasize more the goal of stability.

34. Ibid., p. 235.

35. The figure is obtained from Table II (ibid., p. 236): adding the figures for terminated marriages as a percentage of all terminated partnerships (from 3, 5, 6, & 7), 6.0% of all terminated relationships were marriages. The total of all terminated partnerships is 3652, so 219 were terminated marriages. Following the same procedure for present marriages, 38.4% of all present partnerships, or 1250, are marriages. Therefore, there have been 1469 present and terminated marriages, of which 219, or 15%, are terminated.

36. Ibid., p. 232, n. 2.

37. The figures were obtained in this manner: from Table VII, 128 marriages have been terminated in the 40-50 year-old group, 54 in the 30-39 year-old group, and 17 in the 15-29 year-olds. (It is unclear from the article why the total of 199 does not coincide with the 219 found from Table II.) From Table IV, 914, 425, and 292 women in each respective group have ever been married. Therefore 24.9% of the marriages in the 40-50 year-old group have terminated, and 12.7% and 5.8% in the other groups respectively.

These figures may be somewhat incorrect for two reasons: (1) The percentages result from a comparison of number of terminated marriages with number of women ever married, so if some women have had more than one terminated marriage, the percentages would be slightly different. But there is no data given in the article to allow for a correction of the figures. (2) The data omit terminated marriages from partnerships later than the second, but from Table III (p. 237) it can be seen that only about 2 unions began and ended the third partnership as marriages, and only 3 began the fourth partnership as marriages. These figures are insignificant enough to be ignored in the percentages.

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APPENDIX:

"A PARADIGM FOR FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

IN SOCIOLOGY"

*From Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (Enl. ed.; New York: The Free Press, 1968), pp. 104-108.

work in physiology are, to be trite about it, scarcely matched in sociology. But this scarcely accounts for the systematic ordering of procedure and concepts in the one instance and the disparate, often uncoordinated and not infrequently defective character of procedure and concepts in functional sociology.

A PARADIGM FOR FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS IN SOCIOLOGY

As an initial and admittedly tentative step in the direction of codifying functional analysis in sociology, we set forth a paradigm of the concepts and problems central to this approach. It will soon become evident that the chief components of this paradigm have progressively emerged in the foregoing pages as we have critically examined the vocabularies, postulates, concepts and ideological imputations now current in the field. The paradigm brings these together in compact form, thus permitting simultaneous inspection of the major requirements of functional analysis and serving as an aid to self-correction of provisional interpretations, a result difficult to achieve when concepts are scattered and hidden in page after page of discursive exposition.⁵² The paradigm presents the hard core of concept, procedure and inference in functional analysis.

Above all, it should be noted that the paradigm does not represent a set of categories introduced *de novo*, but rather a *codification* of those concepts and problems which have been forced upon our attention by critical scrutiny of current research and theory in functional analysis. (Reference to the preceding sections of this chapter will show that the groundwork has been prepared for every one of the categories embodied in the paradigm.)

1. *The item(s) to which functions are imputed*

The entire range of sociological data can be, and much of it has been, subjected to functional analysis. The basic requirement is that the object of analysis represent a *standardized* (i.e. patterned and repetitive) item, such as social roles, institutional patterns, social processes, cultural pattern, culturally patterned emotions, social norms, group organization, social structure, devices for social control, etc.

BASIC QUERY: What must enter into the protocol of observation of the given item if it is to be amenable to systematic functional analysis?

2. *Concepts of subjective dispositions (motives, purposes)*

At some point, functional analysis invariably assumes or explicitly operates with some conception of the motivation of individuals involved in a social system. As the foregoing discussion has shown, these concepts of subjective disposition are often and erroneously merged with the related, but different, concepts of objective consequences of attitude, belief and behavior.

⁵² For a brief statement of the purpose of analytical paradigms such as this, see the note on paradigms elsewhere in this volume.

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BASIC QUERY: In which types of analysis is it sufficient to take observed motivations as *data*, as given, and in which are they properly considered as *problematical*, as derivable from other data?

3. Concepts of objective consequences (functions, dysfunctions)

We have observed two prevailing types of confusion enveloping the several current conceptions of "function":

(1) The tendency to confine sociological observations to the *positive* contributions of a sociological item to the social or cultural system in which it is implicated; and

(2) The tendency to confuse the subjective category of *motive* with the objective category of *function*.

Appropriate conceptual distinctions are required to eliminate these confusions.

The first problem calls for a concept of *multiple consequences* and a *net balance of an aggregate of consequences*.

Functions are those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system; and *dysfunctions*, those observed consequences which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system. There is also the empirical possibility of *nonfunctional* consequences, which are simply irrelevant to the system under consideration.

In any given instance, an item may have both functional and dysfunctional consequences, giving rise to the difficult and important problem of evolving canons for assessing the net balance of the aggregate of consequences. (This is, of course, most important in the use of functional analysis for guiding the formation and enactment of policy.)

The second problem (arising from the easy confusion of motives and functions) requires us to introduce a conceptual distinction between the cases in which the subjective aim-in-view coincides with the objective consequence, and the cases in which they diverge.

Manifest functions are those objective consequences contributing to the adjustment or adaptation of the system which are intended and recognized by participants in the system;

Latent functions, correlatively, being those which are neither intended nor recognized.*

BASIC QUERY: What are the effects of the transformation of a previously latent function into a manifest function (involving the problem of the role of knowledge in human behavior and the problems of "manipulation" of human behavior)?

*The relations between the "unanticipated consequences" of action and "latent functions" can be clearly defined, since they are implicit in the foregoing section of the paradigm. The unintended consequences of action are of three types:

- (1) those which are functional for a designated system, and these comprise the latent functions;
- (2) those which are dysfunctional for a designated system, and these comprise the latent dysfunctions; and
- (3) those which are irrelevant to the system which they affect neither functionally nor dysfunctionally, i.e., the pragmatically unimportant class of non-functional consequences.

For a preliminary statement, see R. K. Morison, "The unanticipated consequences of purposive social action," *American Sociological Review* 1936, 1, 894-904; for a tabulation of these types of consequences see Cooley, *Religion Among the Primitives*, 32-33.

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4. *Concepts of the unit subserved by the function*

We have observed the difficulties entailed in confining analysis to functions fulfilled for "the society," since items may be functional for some individuals and subgroups and dysfunctional for others. It is necessary, therefore, to consider a range of units for which the item has designated consequences: individuals in diverse statuses, subgroups, the larger social system and culture systems. (Terminologically, this implies the concepts of psychological function, group function, societal function, cultural function, etc.)

5. *Concepts of functional requirements (needs, prerequisites)*

Embedded in every functional analysis is some conception, tacit or expressed, of the functional requirements of the system under observation. As noted elsewhere,⁵³ this remains one of the cloudiest and empirically most debatable concepts in functional theory. As utilized by sociologists, the concept of functional requirement tends to be tautological or *ex post facto*; it tends to be confined to the conditions of "survival" of a given system; it tends, as in the work of Malinowski, to include biological as well as social "needs."

This involves the difficult problem of establishing types of functional requirements (universal vs. specific); procedures for validating the assumption of these requirements; etc.

BASIC QUERY: What is required to establish the validity of such a variable as "functional requirement" in situations where rigorous experimentation is impracticable?

6. *Concepts of the mechanisms through which functions are fulfilled*

Functional analysis in sociology, as in other disciplines like physiology and psychology, calls for a "concrete and detailed" account of the mechanisms which operate to perform a designated function. This refers, not to psychological, but to social, mechanisms (e.g., role-segmentation, insulation of institutional demands, hierarchic ordering of values, social division of labor, ritual and ceremonial enactments, etc.).

BASIC QUERY: What is the presently available inventory of social mechanisms corresponding, say, to the large inventory of psychological mechanisms? What methodological problems are entailed in discerning the operation of these social mechanisms?

7. *Concepts of functional alternatives (functional equivalents or substitutes)*

As we have seen, once we abandon the gratuitous assumption of the functional indispensability of particular social structures, we immediately require some concept of functional alternatives, equivalents, or substitutes. This focuses attention on the range of possible variation in the items which can, in the case under examination, subserve a functional requirement. It unfreezes the identity of the existent and the inevitable.

BASIC QUERY: Since scientific proof of the equivalence of an alleged functional alternative ideally requires rigorous experimentation, and since this is not often practicable in large-scale sociological situations, which practicable procedures of inquiry most nearly approximate the logic of experiment?

8. *Concepts of structural context (or structural constraint)*

The range of variation in the items which can fulfill designated functions in a social structure is not unlimited (and this has been repeatedly noted in our foregoing discussion). The interdependence of the elements of a social structure limits the effective possibilities of change or functional alternatives.

⁵³ R. K. Merton, "Discussion of Parson's 'Patterns of sociological theory,'" *American Sociological Review*, 1949, 13, 164-169.

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The concept of structural constraint corresponds, in the area of social structure, to Goldenweiser's "principle of limited possibilities" in a broader sphere. Failure to recognize the relevance of interdependence and attendant structural restraints leads to utopian thought in which it is tacitly assumed that certain elements of a social system can be eliminated without affecting the rest of that system. This consideration is recognized by both Marxist social scientists (e.g. Karl Marx) and by non-Marxists (e.g. Malinowski).⁵⁴

BASIC QUERY: How narrowly does a given structural context limit the range of variation in the items which can effectively satisfy functional requirements? Do we find, under conditions yet to be determined, an area of indifference, in which any one of a wide range of alternatives may fulfill the function?

9. Concepts of dynamics and change

We have noted that functional analysts tend to focus on the statics of social structure and to neglect the study of structural change.

This emphasis upon statics is not, however, inherent in the theory of functional analysis. It is, rather, an adventitious emphasis stemming from the concern of early anthropological functionalists to counteract preceding tendencies to write conjectural histories of non-literate societies. This practice, useful at the time it was first introduced into anthropology, has disadvantageously persisted in the work of some functional sociologists.

The concept of dysfunction, which implies the concept of strain, stress and tension on the structural level, provides an analytical approach to the study of dynamics and change. How are observed dysfunctions contained within a particular structure, so that they do not produce instability? Does the accumulation of stresses and strains produce pressure for change in such directions as are likely to lead to their reduction?

BASIC QUERY: Does the prevailing concern among functional analysts

⁵⁴ Previously cited excerpts from Marx document this statement, but these are, of course, only a few out of many places in which Marx in effect stresses the importance of taking account of the structural context. In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (appearing in 1859 and republished in Karl Marx, *Selected Works*, op. cit., I, 354-371), he observes for example: "No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore, mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, we will always find that the task itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation." (p. 357) Perhaps the most famous of his many references to the constraining influence of a given social structure is found in the second paragraph of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*: "Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such conditions as he finds close at hand." (From the preface of the original as published in Marx, *Selected Works*, II, 315.) To my knowledge, A. D. Lindsay is the most perceptive among the commentators who have noted the theoretic implications of statements such as these. See his little book, *Karl Marx's Capital: An Introductory Essay*, (Oxford University Press, 1931), esp. at 27-53.

And for other language with quite different ideological import and essentially similar theoretic implications, see B. Malinowski, "Given a definite cultural need, the means of its satisfaction are small in number, and therefore the cultural arrangement which comes into being in response to the need is determined within narrow limits." "Culture," *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, op. cit., 626.

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with the concept of *social equilibrium* divert attention from the phenomena of *social disequilibrium*? Which available procedures will permit the sociologist most adequately to gauge the accumulation of stresses and strains in a social system? To what extent does knowledge of the structural context permit the sociologist to anticipate the most probable directions of social change?

10. *Problems of validation of functional analysis*

Throughout the paradigm, attention has been called repeatedly to the specific points at which assumptions, imputations and observations must be validated.⁵⁵ This requires, above all, a rigorous statement of the sociological procedures of analysis which most nearly approximate the logic of experimentation. It requires a systematic review of the possibilities and limitations of *comparative* (cross-cultural and cross-group) *analysis*.

BASIC QUERY: To what extent is functional analysis limited by the difficulty of locating adequate *samples of social systems* which can be subjected to comparative (quasi-experimental) study?⁵⁶

11. *Problems of the ideological implications of functional analysis*

It has been emphasized in a preceding section that functional analysis has no intrinsic commitment to an ideological position. This does not gainsay the fact that particular functional analyses and particular hypotheses advanced by functionalists may have an identifiable ideological role. This, then, becomes a specific problem for the sociology of knowledge: to what extent does the social position of the functional sociologist (e.g., vis-à-vis a particular "client" who has authorized a given research) evoke one rather than another formulation of a problem, affect his assumptions and concepts, and limit the range of inferences drawn from his data?

BASIC QUERY: How does one detect the ideological tinge of a functional analysis and to what degree does a particular ideology stem from the basic assumptions adopted by the sociologist? Is the incidence of these assumptions related to the status and research role of the sociologist?

Before proceeding to a more intensive study of some parts of this paradigm, let us be clear about the uses to which it is supposed the paradigm can be put. After all, taxonomies of concepts may be multiplied endlessly without materially advancing the tasks of sociological analysis. What, then, are the purposes of the paradigm and how might it be used?

⁵⁵ By this point, it is evident that we are considering functional analysis as a method for the interpretation of sociological data. This is not to gainsay the important role of the functional orientation in sensitizing sociologists to the collection of types of data which might otherwise be neglected. It is perhaps unnecessary to reiterate the axiom that one's concepts do determine the inclusion or exclusion of data, that, despite the etymology of the term, data are not "given" but are "contrived" with the inevitable help of concepts. In the process of evolving a functional interpretation, the sociological analyst invariably finds it necessary to obtain data other than those initially contemplated. Interpretation and the collection of data are thus inextricably bound up in the array of concepts and propositions relating these concepts. For an extension of these remarks, see Chapter IV.

⁵⁶ George P. Murdock's *Social Structure*, (New York: Macmillan, 1949), is enough to show that procedures such as those involved in the cross-cultural survey hold large promise for dealing with certain methodological problems of functional analysis. See also the procedures of functional analysis in George C. Homans and David M. Schneider, *Marriage, Authority, and Final Causes* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1955).