

"the promise of sociology" by c. wright mills essay sample

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According to C. Wright Mills, what occurs in any one individual's life is interrelated with society as a whole. The sociological imagination gives us the ability to understand the correlation of one's biography, history, and traditions along with the knowledge of the social and historical impact and/or influence society may have on that person or group of people. Mills' notion compels us to investigate into an individual's biography and lifestyles, and place their findings within the surrounding circumstances in which events occur in order to perceive the whole picture of the society in which the individual lives.

Mills says to understand this “ imagination” would be to see the connection between personal troubles and public issues. Personal troubles meaning, problems that are felt personally which are caused by occurrences or feelings in an individual's life; and public issues meaning, issues that affect a group or mass of people with their roots interwoven within an organization or institution and history of a society.

A person can become homeless for many reasons: a family member throws them out of their home because they do not contribute financially, or they become incapable of caring for themselves due to mental illness, or they become addicted to drugs and lose their home trying to support their habit. These are a few examples of personal troubles which most would think are brought about by the individual alone and therefore can be solved by them.

But, when using sociological imagination, one can see that homelessness is also a social problem.

Unemployment rates are high and public assistances rates being low could leave a person unable to sufficiently contribute financially, therefore being forced to leave their home, or there are cutbacks in funds for housing, the closing of hospitals for the mentally ill, or possibly today's fast paced living, working long hours and in some cases, still only making ends meet, bringing about depression; weariness; and hopelessness - or perhaps acceptable social mores concerning drugs being used at first for fun, relaxation or just to ease our everyday stressful lives eventually leads to drug addition.

Another example one may consider to be personal troubles is family violence. Whether it is a women battered by her husband, a child beaten by parents, or possibly the family pet being abused. One might say that it is a man's right to beat his wife for various reasons and that she brought it upon herself and therefore could stop it if she obeyed her husband. A parent may beat their child for justified disciplinary reasons and say, " if the child obeyed their parents they would not get a beating. And, in order to teach the family pet how to behave accordingly, pain must be issued in order for them to learn. Again, sociological imagination would help one to realize how the biological, historical and tradition influences this sort of

mind frame. Religious or family beliefs passed onto the next generation giving the mind frame that it is a man's duty or right to beat his wife, or the same is thought when it comes to rearing children, and some may have been taught that animals only learned by beating them. The impact of the media,

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today's awareness of the violent natures of other families, gangs, countries, etc., the wars and their violent practices. All these and more are factors can be considered and no doubt are factors which relate to the violent natures of people in their own homes which are all public issues interrelated with personal problems.

Mills felt that no social study could be complete intellectually, if it did not come back to the problems of biography, history, and their correlations within a society. He suggested that the user of the sociological imagination should ask three questions which have been the basis of many sociological studies since. His first question, "What is the structure of this particular society?" indicates the need to study all aspects of what makes up a society, its relationships surrounding them (media, locations, family, belief systems, etc.), and what shapes their behaviors and opportunities. His second question, "What are the mechanics by which society is changing?", which looks at how social changes occur (i. e., through war, environmental forces, laws, change in government, commerce, etc.). And, his third question, "What kinds of 'human nature' are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period?". Whereas, taking into consideration the interaction between individuals and their societies, sociology sees where people and groups of people are products of whole societies in which they live.

In studying Mills however briefly, I am beginning to see where my life and the lives of others are interrelated with biography, history, and traditions. We are all just a part of a whole, which is now beginning to make a great deal of

sense to me. I am beginning to ask questions in order to understand clearly what shapes our lives. It seems to me Mills gave sociologists a format to open the doors to a better understanding of the whole picture. As Mills indicated, humans have the capacity to change the social structures around them; I believe seeking knowledge gives one the wisdom to change and make changes which in turn affects us all.