

# Sociological imagination essay sample

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Imagination is the ability to imagine abstract things without having to understand them before. The ability to imagine something that does not necessarily exist in this complex world. Charles Wright Mills (1959: 11) coined up the term the sociological imagination. And in his book, *The Sociological Imagination*, he said that “ this quality is the ability to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within them selves.”

What is this quality of mind that he claims that society is lack of and is what society needs? The sociological imagination enables people to understand the bigger pictures and insights outside their world. Not literally but metaphorically. It enables people to think themselves away and to take into account how individuals are socially related and that we are simultaneously influencing one another. Is also the ability to think anew of why the norms of our daily lives are constantly occurring. (Mills 1959) Almost as if our lives are nothing but a working machine that produces the same things without stopping and without questioning. To have the sociological imagination is to have the power to look at our selves from the outside to the inside. To see our selves from a different angle. Analyzing and thinking about our actions from a different perspective all together. (Mills 1959)

The imagination is an idea that the individual can understand himself more by becoming aware of those individuals in his circumstances in a certain period of time. There are three major concepts that make up the sociological imagination. The first being the social structure of the world. How societies are arranged and organized to form this dynamic system. And how we as

individuals are related whether minute or vast, we are all connected to one another. (Mills 1959) Think of society as dots on a map. Any dot has the ability to connect with any dot in the world. To imagine this is almost impossible. But this is the quality that Mills urges us to acquire. The quality of mind that is able to imagine. (Mills 1959)

Another major component of the sociological imagination is history. We all have to understand how history is formed and how we are integrated into this world to form history as well. Every action we make is a contribution to a different history made. And yet most people do not comprehend this vital fact. From periods of wars to modern era, this is a timeline of difference in history laid across time. To have this sociological imagination we have to learn how society is formed, changed and modified in history. (Mills 1959)

The third component, which is also the last component, is the biography of the world. We talk and walk a certain way, we behave differently from animals and we blame it on ‘human nature’. But what exactly determines human nature? To have the sociological imagination is to be able to understand how varieties of men and women prevail in society and in this period of time. How people are repressed and liberated from laws that we must abide to live. (Mills 1959)

These three elements is the sociological imagination men must have in order to grasp what is really going on in the real world. For most of us, we do not realize this because we live in a bubble. We live in this polished society that is imperfect and we know it. But we are clueless about its flaws. We go around with our daily lives, presenting the world with our newfound talents

and yet often times we are clueless on what is happening to our neighbours who live just next to us. We live together in a society but we do not understand each other. This imagination is a profound power that allows us to see others and ourselves from another perspective. As Mills (1959: 14) wrote, “ The sociological imagination is the most fruitful of this self-consciousness.” Thoughts that once we never understood, we will be able to comprehend now. Decisions that we were once forced to make, we will be able to understand its outcomes now and the reasons we made it, and the way it transformed our lives. (Mills 1959)

The sociological imagination can be related to any of our everyday matter. An example would be the act of drinking tea. It can be tea parties held by the rich and wealthy, tea sessions between two friends or perhaps even enjoying a cup of tea by one’s self can be equally relaxing. The act of drinking tea can be viewed as a routine of a daily basis. Every morning before one starts his day, he will prepare a cup of Earl Grey. The routine itself is however more important than the reality of actually drinking tea. Even when two people meet up to have tea together, it is the get together that is far more important than actually having tea. They are probably more interested in their topic of chat rather than the tea itself. (Mills 1959)

Another sociological imagination of drinking tea is the economic growth of tea leaves itself. The packaging, marketing, distributing and advertising of tea around the world is inter connected and dependent upon each other. These factors often occur in places that are far away from the drinker himself. China, the country that has the highest production of tea leaves controls the global market and the economy status of teas sold around the <https://assignbuster.com/sociological-imagination-essay-sample/>

world. (Hicks 2009) The sociological imagination of this is to show that in any aspects of our lives, our actions are affecting others in a way or another. The circumstance that is brought upon it may not be felt today but it may be felt years later. To have this imagination is to think far ahead of our actions and hoping that whatever actions we do, we do it with a rational mind. (Mills 1959)

Nonetheless though drinking tea can bring joy and people together, it can also be seen as abusive. Tea contains caffeine, which is an energy booster. Caffeine is a brain-stimulating drug that biological increases the heart beat of a normal person. For most people, this is the sole reason of why they are addicted to tea. Tea gives them their daily boost of energy to work throughout their hectic lives. Sometimes even the thought of missing a cup of tea can be highly impacting. The imagination in this example shows that though tea in most countries is acceptable, in other cultures it might not be. And there have also been questions from sociologist around the world of why tea drinkers are not considered as drug addicts where as those who consume marijuana are. (Mills 1959; Daly and Fredholm 1998)

As we are all aware of sociology is the study of human behaviour, studying patterns in society and analyzing current issues. With the sociological imagination, we are not only able to understand why certain issues in life are projected that way but we are also able to learn and see what these issues will become in the future. (Mills 1959) The sociological imagination plays a huge role in today's world. I shall now carry on to discuss how this imagination can help us and the importance of it in the twenty-first century.

It is vital for societies, countries, and nations to have the sociological imagination. The purpose of this imagination is for people to be able to relate their normal daily lives to bigger issues present in their society, country or even nation. Without the ability to see the correlations of their actions towards bigger issues, people will not be able to change for the better good and there will be no room for improvements. If we reflect back upon our world's history, we will be able to see those countries that have acquired the sociological imaginations, countries that are still struggling to find it and countries that are ignorant about it. While some countries have this imagination, some countries alas have lost it. (Schneider and Silverman 2006)

Countries that have the sociological imagination are often times countries where equal rights are practiced, religion is liberal and all men have equal right of speech. These are however just a few traits of those countries that have this imagination. United States being the world's most powerful country no doubt has this imagination. Slavery does not exist anymore and the American Dream is an example of this imagination. All men and women are created equal and that they all have equal number of opportunities to strive for success. " The idea of the American dream has been attached to everything from religious freedom to a home in the suburbs." (Hochschild 1996: 15) The people in the States realized that it important to have this imagination after its country's revolutions. With this imagination, a country is able to move forward and continues to improve itself, to be more advanced as each day passes. (Schneider and Silverman 2006)

Conversely countries that lack this imagination are just the opposite.

Countries that do not have the sociological imagination are often suffering in poverty, constantly experiencing economic crisis and prevalent social injustice. More often they have yet to experience the changes from old ruling regimes to current modern changes. In the book *Global Sociology* by Schneider and Silverman (2006), the people of Mexico have lived under such circumstances. Having to live under the rulers of autocratic as slaves, Mexico is good example of a country that lacks the sociological imagination. From Mayan rulers to Spanish rulers, Mexico has undergone many changes of their political regimes for centuries until today.

Though there was a revolution to gain independence, the people of Mexico still had to succumb to their local government treating the people with the same political rules no different than those foreign rulers. (Mills 1959) Egypt is another prominent example of a country that lacks this imagination. Having being taken advantage of by their own leaders after suffering from revolutions by outsiders, the culture and religious ideas in Egypt were constantly changing from ruler to ruler. Through these examples, we are able to see a common problem here; countries that do not have the sociological imagination will result in stagnant development. Their country is not able to progress and will constantly undergo political and social changes that endanger the safety and the humanity of the people. (Schneider and Silverman 2006)

With the above example this is to prove that is it important in the twenty-first century for the world to have this imagination. For nations that have found their sociological imagination, they are able to identity the roots of <https://assignbuster.com/sociological-imagination-essay-sample/>

their problems and hence make changes from their mistakes. For countries such as Japan, the sociological imagination has inspired them to change for the sake of the better good of their people and the culture of life. Adopting the western views and integrating it into its own political rules, Japan is now one of the most advanced country in terms of electronic gadgets and the automobile industry. (Schneider and Silverman 2006)

For many developing countries around the world it is important that their political leaders understand the idea of this imagination and work around it to improve their country and its people. To have this ability is to have the ability to progress and to move forward. This is the reason why many countries around the world are working hard to acquire this imagination. And in the twenty-first century when we have acquired this imagination, we are able to look pass the past and learn what the future can bring for us and change for the better good of the world. (Schneider and Silverman 2006)

“ The most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between ‘ the personal troubles of milieu’ and ‘ the public issues of social structure’.” (Mills 1959: 14) With this imagination we are able to differentiate between public issues and personal troubles. We will be able to understand how one’s biography and history have a strong correlation and how it is influence by historical forces and structural transformation in society. In this modern century, to understand the difference between these two elements is a form of ability to create opportunity for one’s self. (Mills 1959)

Opportunities laid to us, chances taken us and decisions made by us are all dependent on the context of our social structure. Personal troubles occur



within the characteristics of an individual and within his range of relation with others. “ A trouble is a personal matter: values cherished by an individual are felt by him to be threatened.” (Mills 1959: 15) Opportunity that is presented to an individual is only diminished by his own personal flaws from attainment. In contrast public issues are matters that occur in the environment where the individual is and his range of inner life is. They are normally organizations of historical forces and these forces overlap with each other to form a larger social and historical life. These issues occur when the conditions for opportunity and advancement fall. “ An issue often involves a crisis in institutional arrangements.” (Mills 1959: 15)

An example of this personal troubles and public issues distinction is when a black man goes for a job interview but he shows up an hour late with inappropriate dressing. These flaws of him are his own personal troubles. Not being fit enough for the job has no bearing towards society but towards him only. However if black men are often being unemployed because of their skin colour and not because they are not competent enough than this is a public issue. With the sociological imagination we will be able to identify and distinguish these problems that are occurring. (Mills 1959)

Employment is not the only problem that is happening due to the economic crisis that the world is facing in this modern age. The movement of anti-immigrants and even women’s right can all be influenced and taught by the sociological imagination. For feminism around the world is the idea that has been passed down from waves of movements ever since the 18th century that drive women to stand up for their rights today. This feminist imagination did not just develop overnight, it acted as a catalyst to overcome

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the personal troubles and the public issues of this matter. Though most women nowadays enjoy their luxurious life and their abundance of wealth it is said that we all should not neglect this imagination. For if the sociological imagination did not occur women might still be perhaps under paid and be perceived as nothing more but domestic functionaries. (Mills 1959)

In conclusion the sociological imagination is not just a teaching of sociology in another everyday lesson, is it but a therapy of life to shape our society and our selves to be better people as a whole. To have this imagination is to recognize the relationships between biography and history and to understand that the matters of people are not accounted by the sole fact of personal trouble but because of public affairs as well and vice versa. (Mills 1959) For most people this imagination is nothing more but an abstract idea planted into the minds for the new generation. The absence of it will result in people being trapped in their own living worlds. Almost like being trapped in a glass box. You are able to see the outside but you are not able to step forward. We will be incapable of comprehending the social and structural dimension of our own dilemmas. (Mills 1959)

However for those who truly understand its work and its functions and how vital it is to us will be able to succeed in life and find inner peace within themselves. As I quote from Charles Wright Mills (1959: 17), “ To be aware of the idea of social structure and to use it with sensibility is to be capable of tracing such linkages among a great variety of milieux. To be able to do that is to possess the sociological imagination”. The imagination to see yourself in a glass box looking from the outside to the inside and understanding the connections of you and the world. (Mills 1959)

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