

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION OF ETIENNE RUTKOWSKI

A challenge in sociology, which is defined as the systematic, evidence-based study of society, is understanding the intersection between macro and micro sociology (Ashley and Little, 2019, pg. 9). This can be addressed through a perspective that early sociologist C. Wright Mills (1916-1962) coined as the 'sociological imagination,' which involves the ability to connect one's individual experience to broader social structures. Problems are not shared universally; and therefore, an individual problem cannot be addressed without understanding the broader social context in which that problem exists (C. Wright Mills, 2000, pg. 76).

My life experience includes living in southeast Asia during kindergarten; a traumatic divorce between my parents, who lived on different continents; moving away from home at the age of 13; and a failed professional dance career. These factors contributed to a severe depression, which included suicide attempts and addiction. A clear application of the sociological imagination to my life is the idea of 'anomie,' developed by Émile Durkheim. Anomie is a perceived lack of integration and purpose, and the perception that societal ethics and norms, which give us a sense of direction, are breaking down (Ashley and Little, 2019, pg. 22).

This application of the sociological imagination is particularly resonant with me. When I was a teenager, I became used to living in a relatively unsupervised environment; when I moved back to my hometown and started to split my time between my parents' homes, I felt as though my world was breaking apart. Most compellingly, I experienced the severe dichotomy of my parents' child-rearing views. As I moved into my late teens, I was riddled with psychological attachment issues, a life-threatening depression, an undiagnosed addiction, and a lack of meaningful friendships.

More recently, my life connects to sociological theories surrounding the concept of the constructed “self,” which looks at how we define ourselves internally and externally (Ashley and Little, 2019, 248). Prior to attending my first silent meditation retreat, I explored psychedelic drugs as a way to help alleviate my depression. My experiences with both psychedelics and meditation have allowed for some significant recovery and healing and have resulted in a measure of “ego death.”

Through my study of sociology, I have been able to make insightful connections between socially constructed personality manifestations and the various experiences that “I” define as “me.” This growing understanding has helped me experience a greater calm in the face of difficulties, which is a key part of maintaining my mental health. Reflecting regularly on the concept of sociological imagination, as a way of connecting my personal experiences to the greater system of societal norms, helps me create more space for the exploration of positive connections in my life.

References

- Mills, C. W. (2000). *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.capilanou.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=316643&site=eds-live&scope=site>
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