

properties such as language. The implication is that those theorists who focus on the macrolevel should incorporate more of a focus on aggregation, and those who focus on the microlevel should include more contextual factors.

Randall Collins is another social theorist to take on the task of integrating micro- and macrolevel phenomenon, although he grants heavy priority to the microlevel. In fact, Collins's major essay on the topic was titled "On the Microfoundations of Macrosociology," and he himself calls his effort a "radical microsociology" (1981a, 1981b). Collins believes that all macrolevel phenomena can be understood as combinations of microlevel phenomena. His focus is on interaction, chains of interaction, and the "marketplace" where such interaction takes place. This theory is similar, at least in one sense, to Coleman's in that it is limited by only trying to explain how the micro affects the macro.

Although the distinction between micro and macro is generally thought of in terms of American sociology (see Ritzer and Goodman 2004), at least one European theorist, Norbert Elias, has attempted to solve this dilemma as well. Elias (1978, 1986) was a German theorist (who did most of his work in England and the Netherlands) who did most of his major work during the 1930s. His major contribution to the question of micro-macro integration came in his concept of the figuration. The concept of a figuration was developed to ease the differences between the concept of the "individual" and "society." Figurations are processes (Elias preferred the term *process sociology* to refer to his work) that involve the interweaving of individuals. They are neither more than, nor less than, these interrelationships, but instead they are those interrelationships. They are not planned and occur at every level of society. Elias does not deal with either individuals or society as autonomous entities but instead with "the relationship between people perceived as individuals and people perceived as societies" (1986:23). He views individuals as open and interdependent and believes that the reasons they come together to form specific figurations should be the key question in sociology.

Overall, there have been a number of attempts to integrate the micro- and macrolevels of theory and the work of their representative theorists since the early 1980s (although some did seek to answer this question even prior to that). Harkening back to similar efforts made by some of sociology's most prominent figures, recent theorists have sought to show how both levels merit attention but that the greatest level of focus should be on the ways in which they interact with one another.

— Michael Ryan

See also Agency-Structure Integration; Alexander, Jeffrey; Coleman, James; Collins, Randall; Elias, Norbert; Metatheory; Ritzer, George

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MILLS, C. WRIGHT

C. Wright Mills (1916–1962), the prolific and controversial American sociologist, is best known for his work on the structure and distribution of power in the United States and his critique of theory and method in mainstream sociology. Between 1940 and 1962, he authored or edited twelve books, published nearly 200 articles, commentaries, and reviews, and was working on several major projects when he died of a heart attack at age 45.

Mills was born in Waco, Texas, to a doting mother and a father who was a rising insurance salesman. Mills describes himself as a shy and introverted youngster who admired his father's intelligence and integrity. He was sent to Texas

A&M but transferred to the University of Texas, Austin, where he studied philosophy and economics.

Mills left Texas with both a BA and an MA for the interdisciplinary program at the University of Wisconsin in the 1940s, where he worked most closely with Hans Gerth, a German émigré influenced by the Frankfurt school, with its varying blends of Marx, Weber, and Freud. Several commentators suggest that Mills's work is a unique blend of midwestern populism, American pragmatism, and German sociology.

Mills defined himself as a political radical in the early 1940s by the time he came out of graduate school to take an assistant professor position in sociology at the University of Maryland. He moved in left political circles when he relocated to New York in 1945, where he worked at the Bureau of Applied Research and then joined the Columbia faculty in 1946, working his way to an appointment as full professor in 1956.

Mills's first major book, the *New Men of Power* (1948), assessed the radical political potential of union leaders and found it limited. Mills soon thereafter abandoned the Marxian hope for the working class as the key agent of major social change, calling it a "labor metaphysic." *White Collar* (1952) soon followed, a comparison of the old middle class of small businesspeople with the new middle class of white-collar employees, seeing the latter as trapped between unions and big business, politically dependent and directionless, and driven by a new status. He later described the book as an attempt to make sense of his experience in New York; others thought the experiences of salespeople like his father influenced this work.

Mills next folded his analyses of union leaders and white-collar workers into his major empirical and theoretical work, *The Power Elite* (1956), which rejected both pluralist and Marxist analyses of the American power structure in favor of an institutional analysis that placed power in the hands of an increasingly intermingled leadership group based at the top of large corporations, the executive branch, and the military services. This "power elite" shared similar experiences in managing large institutions and their desire to keep the system running smoothly. The people at the top did what they wanted to, and were increasingly irresponsible, practicing a "higher immorality."

The book received strong reactions from those Mills criticized as well as more disinterested observers, and made Mills into something of a celebrity. He then wrote a little-known reply that became the basis for *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). Mills attacked the overly abstract "grand theories," and in particular the work of Talcott Parsons, the leading theorist of the day. For Mills, Parsons's ahistorical attempt to classify concepts in order to develop a general theory provided little if any understanding of social reality or pressing social issues. Mills also was very critical of the use of a narrow survey method

he called "abstracted empiricism," arguing that it tends to lead to mundane research of no consequence in creating a theory or understanding of social problems. Instead, Mills spoke of the need to define sociology as the intersection of biography and history, employ a wide range of methods, strive for intellectual craftsmanship, and engage the general public on the basis of both rational values and solid social science.

At the same time, Mills began to try to make political sense of the post-Stalin Soviet Union and other political changes. He wrote what he called his "pamphlets," *The Causes of World War III* (1958), an attack on the Cold Warriors for "crackpot realism," and *Listen, Yankee* (1960), an attempt to keep the United States from crushing the Cuban Revolution. In 1960 he wrote a "Letter to the New Left" in Great Britain and then published a revised version in 1961 for the American New Left, which viewed him as one of their key inspirations.

Still, he continued his academic work as a sociologist. He had decided he had to come to terms with Marxism, and the result was his last book, *The Marxists* (1963), in which he criticized the "sophisticated Marxists" for trying to save a failed model. He nonetheless declared himself a "plain Marxist," meaning he worked in the spirit of Marx and used his method to create the kind of model that would capture current historical realities.

Mills's place in sociology is hard to assess, partly due to his self-presentation as a rebel and dissenter. By refusing to work with graduate students at Columbia in the 1950s because he thought they were too set in their thinking, there were few new sociologists to further develop his theoretical ideas. In addition, although often claimed by young radical sociologists as the "father of radical sociology," it was mainly Mills's critique of mainstream sociology, not his theoretical insights, that had the greatest impact on radical sociological research.

Nevertheless, when all is said and done, several of Mills's early essays remain classics that continue to be cited in the literature. Some of the ideas and findings in the *Power Elite* have been assimilated into mainstream political sociology. Many of his key ideas, such as the power elite and the sociological imagination, are widely employed. *The Sociological Imagination* continues to be used in sociology courses to inspire students to think for themselves and see the exciting possibilities that exist within sociology for understanding—and even changing—society. Most of all, though, Mills will endure as a symbol of the upstart, hard-working iconoclast who jumps through all the academic hoops, challenges the mainstream of the discipline, and attempts to reach larger publics on the basis of both his values and ideas.

— G. William Domhoff

See also Marx, Karl; Parsons, Talcott; Power

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MINNICH, ELIZABETH

Elizabeth Minnich, a graduate faculty member at the Union Institute in Cincinnati, is the author of *Transforming Knowledge* (1990). This study pivots around issues of curricular transformation in particular and knowledge construction in general. Educated in the liberal arts at Sarah Lawrence College (BA) and in philosophy at the New School for Social Research (MA and PhD), now named New School University, Minnich situates herself theoretically between modernism and postmodernism. She argues, for instance, that the “heady postmodern attack on universals *per se*” may be misguided inasmuch as “it may not be universals that are the problem but . . . *faulty* universals and the particularities they frame” (p. 56)

Arguing that equality entails not sameness but the “right to be different,” Minnich goes on to argue that “[f]aulty generalizations by those in power create and express not dualisms, but hierarchical monism” (p. 70). By hierarchical monism she means that “supposedly parallel categories . . . do not name parallel groups; the categories are indeed paired, but they are not expressions of a complementary dualism, nor even an oppositional one.” Paired categories, such as women/men, refer not to anything “separate but equal” but to hierarchies that socially construct not only difference but also inequality. Worse, one category in these hierarchical pairs gets represented as the “real thing” (p. 73) with the other category being some lesser version of that thing, whether it be theologian, citizen, or assembly line worker.

On these (and other) bases, Minnich returns to faulty generalizations. She says their theoretical damage gets done through “circular reasoning in which the *sources* of standards, justifications, interpretations, reappear as *examples* of that which is best, most easily justified, most richly interpreted by those standards” (p. 84). Middle-class standards of cleanliness, child rearing, and religiosity, for example, are often used to denigrate and regulate the lives of lower-income persons and families. Middle-income experts of all sorts promulgate those standards that in turn are used to bolster and justify their own moral and political authority. Closer to home is the substantial segregation

of feminist theory in textbooks and curricula, as if it is an inferior version of theory or social theory. Minnich’s work shows how social realities such as feminist theory get represented as specialized versions of social theory, as if scholars get more insights into social realities from masculinist than from feminist texts.

In the end, Minnich deems it unnecessary to “undo all universals” (pp. 180–81). Instead, she urges that we “particularize accurately” so as “to demystify the functions of power and hierarchy.” In her view, that strategy enables us “to cease turning difference into deviance” and equality into sameness, while also enabling us “to live and work with more complexity and fineness of feeling and comprehension, taste and judgment” (p. 184).

— Mary F. Rogers

See also Feminist Epistemology; Feminist Ethics

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MODERNITY

The term *modern* and its derivatives are not new, and they are ambiguous in their meanings, especially if one considers the globe’s competing worldviews and cosmologies. Whereas modernity has had for some time a positive connotation in the West, particularly among the more educated classes, the same cannot be said about the notion as understood in other parts of the world, where, until very recently in their long cultural histories, the cardinal virtues of social and intellectual life have always been stability, continuity, and predictability. The very notion that “change is natural and good,” accepted almost without reflection by many citizens of Western nations for the last several centuries, has been wholly repugnant, even inconceivable, to those billions of Asians and Africans who devoutly followed the doctrines of Confucius, Buddha, Hinduism, or Islam. The famous Chinese curse “May you live in interesting times” wryly captures this widespread human sentiment. This basic contradiction between worldviews, perhaps more than any other single factor, has sparked the repeated cultural and political conflicts among cultural zones of the world, where, in most other ways, life might have been viewed in similar, even sympathetic, terms. Thus, the concept of modernity is not of merely analytic or academic interest. Considered broadly, it contains one of the major keys toward understanding why geopolitical and cultural instability has become the standard condition of