The stranger and double consciousness

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**Introduction**

Social theories give an insight into the association between individuals and societies. Social theorists proposed these theories to provide a way to comprehend the existence of societies and their formation. Georg Simmel and W.E.B. Du Bois have significant contributions in the area of social sciences. These have put forward the concepts of “the stranger” and “double consciousness”. Simmel concept of stranger refers to a person who is although the part of the system but has no strong association with the system. This person has social bonds with the society but he is not freely connected. On the other hand, W.E.B. Du Bois presented his idea of “double consciousness”. Double consciousness refers to the sense of looking at one’s self through the eyes of others. This results in the development of two personalities in a person. One factor behind these double personalities is the result of having different races in society. This essay will compare and contrast the Simmel’s concept of the stranger and Du Bois’ concepts of the double consciousness and the veil.

**Discussion**

Earlier classical sociologists considered self as a result of social processes. Mutual recognition and communication between individuals in society have a significant role in the development of self. However, some points remained unaddressed by these theorists; limits to communication and effect of racialization on mutual recognition. Du Bois addressed these points through his concepts of double consciousness. Du Bois first presented his idea of double consciousness in his publication, “The Souls of Black Folk” in 1903. He had presented this idea in the context of race relations in the United States. He concluded the problem of the twentieth century as the problem of the color-line.

American society had historically repressed Blacks and debased them making difficult for Blacks to unify their black identity with their American identity. Therefore, Blacks not only view themselves from their own point of view but also from others point of you(Lewis 1993). Du Bois work is mostly related to the period immediately following the Civil War. After the revolution, Africans, who were slaves, became American citizens. However, whites were not ready to accept them and they mistreated them and did not give them access to education, health care and businesses. Black then started considering them as inferior to the whites as they started seeing them through the eyes of other people. His idea of double consciousness had emerged as a result of his encounter with radicalization. His everyday experiences of radicalization led him down the path of critical race theory. Moreover, Du Bois also analyzed the Freedmen's Bureau's role in reconstruction(Lewis 1993). According to him, the Bureau's failures were the result of biases of courts along with the Southern opposition. His double consciousness is also a cause of conflict within the black American, as they fight to settle their individuality as a black person as well as an American citizen.

Du Bois theory consists of three elements; the veil, twoness, and second sight. The first element is veil refers to the color line. In practical, this concept is about white people’s absence of clarity to realize Black people as factual Americans(Du Bois and Marable 2015). Moreover, it is also about Black people’s absence of clarity to realize them outside of what white America labels and recommends for them. The second element twoness refers to the phenomenological explanation of the situation of self-formation behind the veil. Twoness can produce different responses to the veil. In addition, the second sight is people’s capability to view themselves from their and other perspectives. People having second sight are able to see the past rulings and biases and their effects over their lives.

Thus, Du Bois has taken race both as an objective demographic categorization, as well as a figurative and empirical reality. Du Bois pointed out the color line as the central problem of the society. Racial prejudice in society is a veil that splits black people from whites. This subjectivity develops into double-consciousness that forced Black people to experience cruelty. When African Americans strained to position themselves within American society, then they got the feelings of double consciousness. African Americans even after their liberation from slavery did not get their significant citizenship as a result of “veil” of race in their society. Blacks can see this veil while Whites cannot as they belong to the governing group. Resultantly, Blacks got the challenge of evolving a self-conscious within a white society. Whites and Blacks are different in terms of intelligence and their capacity to work hard. Thus, European whites were superior to Blacks(Lewis 1993). Prior to Du Bois, these differences were attributed to biological differences. Conversely, Du Bois rejected this and argued through his 60-year career that racial inequality was not entrenched in biological variances. He considered the society responsible for these differences. Thus, the history of the American Negro can be considered as the history of their dissertation. Throughout history, they tried to attain their self-conscious.

Simmel, on the other hand, proposed his concept of a stranger. He was born in Berlin to a Jewish family that later converted to Christianity. He had faced social marginality in his family as well as in his career. In 1881, he got his doctorate in philosophy from Berlin and also got a lecturer position there. He was a great intellectual due to his interest and knowledge in a wide variety of subjects. However, he did not get good positions in his career due to his link with Jewish society. His race prohibited him from conquering the prominent academic post. Based on his experience, he proposed his theory related to the creation of social marginalization in societies.

He introduced the principle of emergence that refers to the emergence of higher levels from lower levels. Moreover, his theory has four basic levels of concerns. He was concerned with the psychological workings of social life. He was also interested in sociological mechanisms of interpersonal relations and structure and changes in the Zeitgeist. Likewise, his theory also included his concept of nature and inescapable destiny of humankind.

According to him, society consists of a web of patterned interactions and sociology must study these interactions as they happen and recapped in assorted historic eras. Sociologists must study these forms of these interactions. Simmel did not agree with theories of Comte and Spencer(Simmel 1950). They stress the continuity of society and social processes. Simmel rejected these views and did not take society as an organism. He put his own perspective to understand a self-conscious. He considered society a number of individuals who are linked by interaction. Society has different super individual structures such as state and family which are the products of manifestations of this interaction. These interactions bind society and allow it to perform different functions.

Moreover, he proposed the idea of a stranger in society. There must have strangers to bring innovations in societies. A stranger has partial involvement in group affairs and is thus a valuable member of the society and provide benefit to society(Simmel n.d.). Likewise, society has no fear of him as it knows that it is not closely connected to anyone and cannot cause harm. He has a special position in the group and is responsible for carrying out special tasks. The stranger can serve different functions in the society such as of judgment as he does have to develop strong ties with any group.

The classical example of Simmel can be taken as of Europeans Jew who had been serving as a trader. He being the middlemen carried out the possible exchanges among individuals who are outside the boundaries of groups. Jews were part of the society but they were not given rights such as legal, political and property rights. Thus, they indulged into mobile activities such as trading. Simmel considered this as the mobility of this group. Moreover, their unattached relation to that society also gave them objectivity. Objectivity here can be regarded as the freedom of acting in the desired direction.

This stranger of Simmel is one of his proposed social types. In order to supplement his catalog of social forms, he has also proposed other types such as mediator, poor, adventurer, a man in the middle as well as a renegade. All these types result from the specifiable reactions and prospects of others in society. One group assigns a certain position to others and expects the fulfillment of certain roles. In addition, Georg Simmel also worked on the sizes of groups and effect on the interactions among groups and society.

He has analyzed the social units using the approach of dynamic interconnectedness. During these interactions, there also emerge conflict and tension between the individual and society. Individuals have dual relations with society; they live in society and stand against it. When there arises conflict, then further relationships develop. He classified a group of two people as Dyad, having deep interactions such as marriage. He also considered it as the least stable category of groups. According to him, a Triad is a group of three people. This group is more stable as compared to Dyad, as now there is a third person in a group, which can resolve conflicts. In most cases, it is believed that larger groups are more secure as compared to smaller groups. However, larger groups have less intense interactions. Simmel focused on the social physiological features of modern urban culture. In urban culture, anonymous people meet with each other in their lives. However, they do not have any emotional connections and social bonds. They live in this society and during their interaction with society, there also develops tensions.

There are many similarities between the concepts of the stranger and double consciousness. Both provide a way of linking with any group despite having a sense of otherness. These theories do not allow persons to have a sense of self. The stranger has its place in the group collectively; however, it also subsists outside of the group. Both the stranger and double-consciousness provide the explanation of this existence of a person both within and outside the group. With this, there are also differences between these concepts. Simmel’s stranger can be regarded as the positive and sure kind of contribution. He due to his position within the group can get many benefits. In contrast, the marginal position of Blacks in society is an undesirable and sure system of cruelty. Simmel’s concept of the stranger is frequently recognized as the marginal man, which is a dissimilar social type.

**Conclusion**

Georg Simmel can be regarded as the forefather of sociology along with Du Bois. Simmel’s concept of the stranger, the marginal man provides the basis for the field of intercultural communication. Furthermore, it also offers an apprehension about the nature of social order: Du Bois double consciousness also has an importance in understanding the classes in society. Moreover, Du Bois double consciousness has many similarities with Simmel’s discussion of the stranger. Both theories highlight the sense of otherness that impedes social solidarity. Moreover, both theorists use the metaphor of a veil that defines the social distance between people. These concepts are also prevailing in today society. For example, feminists are using these concepts extensively. These concepts also analyze Black American culture effectively. From Jim Crow to Million Man March, there can be seen a color line in American society. In American culture, Blacks consider themselves at the hatred of white America as they also see themselves from the eyes of others. They do not contribute positively due to this double consciousness. However, Du Bois was not only applying his concept to the American society but he was applying it worldwide. Georg Simmel concept of society’s segmentation is also applicable to all societies worldwide.Individuals perform their multifaceted roles that lead to the need for division of labor.

In addition, Du Bois was principally anxious about the nature and connection of race and class. Georg Simmel and Du Bois both highlighted the sense of otherness that not only slows up social solidarity but also foils the configuration of a unified sense of self. Moreover, both Simmel and Du Bois used the concept of a veil to explain the social distance between people. However, Du Bois had viewed his concept as having positive attributes. His concept assists in understanding the class lines in societies. This concept highlights the social bonds in societies. On the other hand, the concept of a stranger does not account for the strong ties in the societies. Although the stranger performs the positive roles in groups and societies due to lack of strong ties there always creates a sense of social discord.

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