

# making the familiar strange sociology

**making the familiar strange sociology** is a fundamental concept in sociological inquiry that encourages individuals to critically examine everyday life and social norms from a new perspective. This approach challenges the taken-for-granted assumptions about society by viewing common social practices, behaviors, and institutions as unfamiliar or peculiar. By doing so, it reveals the underlying social forces, power dynamics, and cultural patterns that shape human interactions and social structures. Making the familiar strange sociology enables a deeper understanding of how social contexts influence individual experiences and collective behavior. This article explores the origins, significance, and practical applications of this concept within sociology. It also highlights key sociological thinkers and provides examples that illustrate the transformative power of this analytic tool. The following sections will guide readers through the essential aspects of making the familiar strange sociology.

- Understanding the Concept of Making the Familiar Strange in Sociology
- Historical Origins and Key Sociological Theorists
- Importance of Making the Familiar Strange in Sociological Research
- Practical Applications and Examples
- Techniques for Employing Making the Familiar Strange in Analysis

## Understanding the Concept of Making the Familiar Strange in Sociology

The concept of making the familiar strange sociology involves adopting a critical perspective that questions the normality of everyday life. This process encourages sociologists and students alike to view social phenomena not as natural or inevitable but as constructed and contingent. By defamiliarizing what is commonly accepted, it becomes possible to unravel the social, cultural, and historical factors that give rise to those phenomena.

Making the familiar strange is rooted in the sociological imagination, a term coined by C. Wright Mills, which links individual experiences with broader societal patterns. This approach helps to expose the social structures and forces that shape behaviors, beliefs, and institutions that may otherwise be overlooked.

## Defining the Process

At its core, making the familiar strange sociology is an analytic strategy that involves:

- Questioning everyday assumptions and norms
- Examining social practices from a new or outsider perspective
- Revealing hidden social rules and power relations
- Highlighting the constructed nature of seemingly natural phenomena

This process challenges individuals to reconsider their own social realities and the taken-for-granted nature of social life.

## Historical Origins and Key Sociological Theorists

The origins of making the familiar strange sociology can be traced back to classical sociological theory and philosophy. Early sociologists and thinkers laid the groundwork for this approach by advocating for critical reflection on social life.

### Émile Durkheim and Social Facts

Émile Durkheim emphasized the importance of studying social facts—patterns of behavior and thought external to the individual but exerting control over them. By treating social facts as things to be studied objectively, Durkheim helped establish a method for analyzing the social world that aligns with making the familiar strange.

### Max Weber and Verstehen

Max Weber introduced the concept of *verstehen*, or interpretive understanding, which involves empathetically comprehending the meanings individuals attach to their actions. This approach encourages stepping outside of one's own assumptions to understand social behavior from the perspective of others, a key element of making the familiar strange sociology.

### Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann

In their influential work, Berger and Luckmann explored the social construction of reality, arguing that everyday knowledge and reality are created through social interactions. They advocated for a sociological approach that questions the apparent naturalness of social institutions and everyday life, embodying the principle of making the familiar strange.

# Importance of Making the Familiar Strange in Sociological Research

Making the familiar strange sociology is vital for rigorous sociological research because it allows scholars to uncover the complexities and contradictions of social life. Without this critical lens, researchers risk accepting social phenomena at face value, thereby missing crucial insights.

## Enhancing Critical Thinking

This approach fosters critical thinking by encouraging researchers to question and analyze the deeper social meanings behind everyday actions and institutions. It challenges dominant narratives and exposes inequalities, injustices, and power imbalances that are often obscured.

## Uncovering Social Patterns

By making the familiar strange, sociologists identify patterns and structures that influence behavior and social outcomes. This helps in understanding how social contexts shape individual choices, group dynamics, and institutional practices.

## Facilitating Social Change

Highlighting the constructed and contingent nature of social realities can inspire social change by revealing possibilities for alternative ways of organizing society. It encourages questioning of the status quo and supports movements toward equity and justice.

## Practical Applications and Examples

Making the familiar strange sociology has broad applications across various subfields and topics within sociology. It is an indispensable tool for analyzing social phenomena in education, family, work, culture, and more.

### Example: Family Dynamics

Family life is often taken as a natural and universal institution. However, making the familiar strange reveals that family structures and roles vary widely across cultures and historical periods. This perspective uncovers how economic, political, and cultural forces shape what is considered a “normal” family.

### Example: Workplace Norms

Work environments and professional behavior are usually accepted without question. By making these settings strange, sociologists examine power relations, workplace hierarchies, and the social construction of

professionalism, which influence employee experiences and organizational outcomes.

## **Example: Cultural Practices**

Everyday cultural practices, such as greetings, dress codes, or rituals, are often invisible to insiders. Making the familiar strange allows sociologists to interpret these practices' meanings and functions within society, revealing their role in identity formation and social cohesion.

- Interrogating taken-for-granted social norms
- Analyzing institutional power structures
- Exploring cultural variability and social change

## **Techniques for Employing Making the Familiar Strange in Analysis**

Sociologists use various methodological and conceptual techniques to effectively make the familiar strange sociology in their research and teaching.

### **Ethnographic Observation**

Ethnography involves immersive observation of social settings, allowing researchers to notice details and behaviors that participants may overlook. This direct engagement helps uncover implicit social rules and assumptions.

### **Comparative Analysis**

Comparing social phenomena across different cultures or historical periods exposes variability and challenges the notion of universality. This comparative technique is a powerful way to defamiliarize the familiar.

### **Critical Questioning**

Asking fundamental questions about why social practices exist, who benefits from them, and how they could be different stimulates critical reflection and analytic distance.

### **Reflexivity**

Researchers adopting reflexivity continuously examine their own assumptions, biases, and social positions.

This self-awareness is crucial to successfully making the familiar strange, as it prevents uncritical acceptance of the researcher's own social norms.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What does 'making the familiar strange' mean in sociology?**

'Making the familiar strange' is a concept in sociology that involves looking at everyday, taken-for-granted social phenomena from a new, critical perspective to uncover underlying social structures and assumptions.

### **Who popularized the idea of 'making the familiar strange' in sociology?**

The concept is often attributed to sociologist Peter Berger, who emphasized the importance of sociological imagination and seeing the ordinary aspects of life in an unfamiliar way.

### **Why is 'making the familiar strange' important for sociological analysis?**

'Making the familiar strange' helps reveal hidden social patterns, power dynamics, and cultural norms that shape behavior, enabling a deeper understanding of society beyond common sense.

### **How can students apply 'making the familiar strange' in their daily lives?**

Students can apply this by questioning everyday routines, social roles, and interactions, analyzing how societal influences shape their experiences and perceptions rather than accepting them as natural.

### **Can 'making the familiar strange' help in understanding social inequalities?**

Yes, by challenging taken-for-granted assumptions, this approach exposes how social inequalities are maintained and justified through seemingly normal social practices and institutions.

### **What role does culture play in 'making the familiar strange'?**

Culture provides the context for what is considered normal; by making the familiar strange, sociologists scrutinize cultural norms and values that appear natural but are socially constructed.

### **How does 'making the familiar strange' relate to the sociological imagination?**

Both concepts encourage seeing the connection between individual experiences and larger social forces,

promoting critical thinking about the social world and one's place within it.

## Is 'making the familiar strange' applicable outside academia?

Absolutely, this approach can be used in everyday life to foster critical awareness, challenge stereotypes, and promote social change by questioning accepted norms and practices.

## What are common methods used to 'make the familiar strange' in sociological research?

Methods include ethnography, interviews, and critical observation, which allow sociologists to examine social interactions and institutions from new perspectives that reveal hidden social dynamics.

## Additional Resources

### 1. *The Sociological Imagination* by C. Wright Mills

This seminal work encourages readers to see the connection between personal experiences and larger social forces. Mills introduces the concept of the sociological imagination as a tool to make the familiar strange, urging us to question everyday assumptions and understand the social contexts behind individual behavior. The book challenges conventional thinking and promotes critical awareness of society.

### 2. *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* by Peter L. Berger

Berger invites readers to explore sociology as a way to view the world differently. He emphasizes the idea of "making the familiar strange" by revealing the social structures and patterns that shape ordinary life. This accessible introduction highlights the importance of curiosity and open-mindedness in sociological inquiry.

### 3. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* by Erving Goffman

Goffman analyzes social interactions through the lens of theatrical performance. He reveals how individuals manage impressions and construct identities in everyday settings, encouraging readers to view familiar social situations with a new perspective. The book transforms ordinary encounters into complex social performances.

### 4. *Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann

This influential text explores how knowledge and reality are created through social processes. It challenges readers to reconsider what is "natural" or "given" by examining the ways societies construct meaning. The book makes the everyday world appear strange by uncovering the underlying social agreements that sustain it.

### 5. *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* by Barry Glassner

Glassner examines how media and social forces shape public perceptions of risk and danger. By uncovering

the discrepancies between real threats and perceived fears, the book encourages a critical look at commonly accepted beliefs. It makes the familiar strange by exposing how fear is socially constructed.

6. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* by Pierre Bourdieu

Bourdieu explores how tastes in art, food, and culture are linked to social class and power relations. He reveals that what seems like personal preference is deeply influenced by social structures, challenging the assumption of individual autonomy. The book invites readers to see everyday cultural choices in a new, sociological light.

7. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* by Howard S. Becker

Becker investigates how society labels certain behaviors and groups as deviant. This work makes the familiar strange by questioning the norms that define conformity and deviance, showing that these categories are socially constructed rather than inherent. It encourages a rethinking of social control and identity.

8. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* by Arlie Russell Hochschild

Hochschild explores how emotions are regulated and commodified in the workplace, particularly in service industries. The book challenges readers to reconsider everyday emotional experiences as products of social and economic forces. It reveals the hidden labor behind emotional interactions.

9. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* by James C. Scott

Scott critiques large-scale social planning and its often unintended consequences. By analyzing how states simplify complex social realities, the book encourages readers to question official narratives and familiar administrative practices. It makes the workings of bureaucratic power strange and visible.

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