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# *On Trust*

## **Introduction**

Trust makes social life possible. With this research, we join the growing numbers of sociologists interested in the study of trust (see Sztompka, 1999; Cook, 2001 for up-to-date overviews of the field). As a decidedly social phenomenon, trust emerges from and maintains itself within the interactions of everyday people, interactions supported by and made possible by social structural forces. Emphasis on the interactional emergence of trust differentiates this research from others within the field of sociology. Our inherently interactionally constructivist focus complements a second interest, that of a practical sociology. The production of a sound theoretically and empirically based practice of trust is the goal for this book, for knowledge requires usefulness. Finally, our focus on the friendship and/or love relationship makes it amenable to the study of interpersonal trust. This chapter presents a working definition of trust, a rationale for our research's focus on love and friendship relationships, a theoretical foundation for the creation of an interactional sociology of trust, and the methodological basis for this study.

## **Describing and Defining Trust**

A multitude of definitions of trust have been offered, most of them based upon a very rational notion of trust as expectation. For example, Barber (1983) proposed three expectations that are important for the development of trust: expectations for social order, expectations for competent role performance and expectations that people will place others' interest before their own (e.g. fiduciary obligations). In Garfinkel's (1967) conception of trust, he moves beyond specific expectations to a generalized expectation of the individual for order and stability in the world of everyday interaction.

Some theorists have moved beyond mere expectation when conceptualizing trust, for something seems to be missing in a purely rational definition. Lewis and Weigert (1985a) promote a view of trust as when "members of that system act according to and are secure in the expected futures constituted by the presence of each other or their symbolic representations" (p. 465). Emphasis upon symbolic

representation, the emergent state of security, and the behavioral enactment results in Lewis and Weigert's (1985a) three dimensions of trust: cognitive, emotional and behavioral, respectively. The cognitive element acknowledges that one must decide whom and when to trust with individual decisions eventually becoming enveloped by the norm of trust or "trust in trust" that is characterized by a collective cognitive orientation to trust. The emotional dimension of trust recognizes the powerful emotions engendered by trusting, for violations of trust give rise to intense emotional experiences. Finally, the behavioral dimension of trust focuses on the individual's behavior, which is predicated on the certainty of the others' behavior even in the face of inherent uncertainty of all interactions.

Luhmann (1979) adds the element of risk into a definition of trust. Trust owes its existence to risk. "Trust is a gamble, a risky investment" (1979: 24); so one can never be sure of the actions of the other, if one could be, this would eliminate the need for trust. Trust's relationship to risk distinguishes it from confidence. Luhmann (1988) asserts: "If you do not consider alternatives (every morning you leave the house without a weapon!), you are in a situation of confidence. If you choose one action in preference to others in spite of the possibility of being disappointed by the action of others, you define the situation as one of trust" (p. 97). Confidence is externally oriented whereas trust is internally oriented; when disappointment occurs in the case of confidence, one does not attribute responsibility to one's own behavior for that outcome, with the opposite being true in the case of trust. Confidence in the modern society more often takes the form of an assurance that one's expectations will be met; an assurance that is conferred by systemic arrangements and a culture characterized by a generalized belief in trust, or trust in trust.

Modernity necessitates trust, but more often than not this trust is more systematically based than interactionally based. Lewis and Weigert (1985a) make this distinction in their holism versus atomism debate. Holism presupposes a social order that emerges from collective properties that move beyond the characteristics or actions of mere individuals; as such, society is made possible through trust in individuals and its institutions but only insofar as individuals are representative of institutional norms and roles. Atomism places primacy upon a social order that is brought about by the actions of individuals who are autonomous agents negotiating in their own best interests. Simmel (1908/1950a) makes similar distinctions in his differentiation of metaphysical trust from existential trust (as termed such by Lewis & Weigert, 1985a); religious faithfulness in its pure form exemplifies metaphysical trust; at the human level, it translates to a "'faith' of man in man. Perhaps what has been characterized here is a fundamental category of human conduct, which goes back to the metaphysical sense of our relationships" (1950: 318, footnote 1). In contrast, trust that emerges from interactions with particular others is existential trust (see Lewis & Weigert, 1985a).

Finally, our previous research led us to a more interactionally relevant definition of trust (Weber & Carter, 1998). Our definition emphasizes trust as

*an orientation* between self and other whose object is the relationship. Trust's premise is the belief that the other will take one's perspective into account when making a decision and will not act in ways to violate the moral standards of the relationship (Weber & Carter, 1998). From this definition, the cognitive, moral and social dimensions of trust emerge. Trust's basis is the cognitive ability that G.H. Mead (1934) defines as role-taking, that is, the imaginative placement of oneself in the shoes of the other so that one can better see the world from the other's perspective. The value orientations of self and other that serve to preserve the relationship (e.g. reciprocity, do no harm) represent trust's moral dimension. Finally, the social dimension appears upon recognition that trust emerges only in relationship to real or imagined others; that trust is an orientation implies that it is a way that self acts toward the other because self trusts the other, as well as a way that the other acts toward self, because the other is trusted.

Posing trust as an orientation presents a curious intellectual dilemma, akin to attempting to walk on a tightrope over a pool of water with crocodiles on one side and alligators on the other. If we fall, does it make a difference where we land? The term orientation lies midway between the idea of trust as a structure and the idea of pure malleability found in trust as a purely individualized or psychologized phenomenon. Lewis and Weigert (1985a) also loosely define trust as an orientation, as does Simmel (1950), who defines trust as a "fundamental attitude toward the other" (p. 318, footnote 1). Trust as an orientation implies that: (1) it does not exist prior to its enactment, (2) it is a state of the relationship that is emergent, and (3) it structures the relationship. In some relationships, the trust orientation is more emergent than others, for example, friendships and love relationships. In others, the trust orientation is more structurally based, as in family relationships.

### **The Friendship and Love Relationship**

By choosing friendships and love relationships, we are focusing on the realm of interpersonal trust. Commonly referred to as close relationships (Cramer, 1998), friendships and love relationships provide the relational material for interpersonal trust, as distinct from institutional trust or confidence as found within families (e.g. parent-child relationships especially), the marketplace (e.g. consumer-producer) and so on. In addition, our study avoids a focus on stranger relationships, for we believe that the kind of behavior that emerges with unknown others, whether in an institutionally reinforced interaction or happenstance encounter, is not trust, *per se*. Our interest in friendship and love relationships is for two reasons: first, its emergent quality and second, its voluntary character. Each of these traits allows for the examination of the construction, destruction and reconstruction of interpersonal trust.

Trust's emergent character is most visible in emergent relationships. Emergence is a quality of those relationships that come to be through time, a typification of the present state of interaction that is forever changing, thus establishing the forever emergent quality of its being. Emergence focuses on how both trust and friendship and love relationships come to be. In the most structured of familial relationships, those between parent and child, trust is an established character of the relationship whether or not it is realized. In these kinds of familial relationships wherein trust is a "given" from birth, it is difficult to study trust's interactional production: trust is built into the normative constraints surrounding the relationship. With this thinking in mind, our study's focus became the emergent relationships of friendship and love relationships.

The voluntary character of the friendship and love relationship is premised upon the ideal of trust as an act of autonomous beings who willfully decide to enter into, maintain and withdraw from relationships based upon knowledge of a particular other. According to Wright (1984), "friendship is defined as a relationship involving voluntary or unconstrained interaction in which the participants respond to one another personally, that is as unique individuals rather than as packages of discrete attributes or mere role occupants" (p. 119). Eisenstadt (1974) states that many of the characteristics of friendship and kinship are ideally similar. We believe this is true also of love relationships such as marital relationships in contemporary society. Friendship and love are two social forms that "are built, at least in their idea, upon the person in its totality" (Simmel 1908/1950: 325). Simmel recognizes the difficulty of knowing in totality any other in these modern times, as a consequence, differentiated friendships and love relationships (to a lesser extent) predominate. That actors can voluntarily enter into relationships with particular others provides fertile grounds for a study of trust which is itself a voluntary act premised upon the belief of a known other, however faulty that premise may be. With our rationale for focusing on friendships and love relationships stated, this chapter turns to the development of the theoretical basis for this study.

## **A Theoretical Foundation**

Our theoretical position begins with the idea of trust as a social construct. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), everyday reality emerges from a dialectical process that involves externalization, objectivation and internalization. Externalization is the process that moves a private thought, idea or action to the public realm, providing recognition that individuals are creators of the social world. Objectivation occurs when individuals view these ideas, thoughts or actions as facts, having a quality independent of their actual creation by humans. During this process, the social structure and the individual meet as the enactment of roles and the utilization of language of the objectivated world confronts individuals

in their everyday lives. The personalization of the objectivated world is internalization, when the individual carves out his or her “own” view of the world through socialization processes. As applied to trust, trust is an objectivated product of the relationship between two or more individuals that serves to make that relationship more subjectively meaningful, that is, a friendship or love relationship as distinguished from other types of relationships. As an objectivated product, trust emerges out of the interactions between individuals and it serves to order these relationships by influencing interaction. As subjectively meaningful action, trust orientation is toward particular others, is based upon unique experiences, and is flavored by specific value orientations that make the relationship more personally meaningful. These subjectively meaningful experiences achieve significance for the self, come to be labeled love, friendship, etc., when they are understood to bespeak some kind of a commitment to the other. That is, the “general” is experienced through an intense experience of the highly “particular,” “unique” and “specific.” When one trusts another, one acts in a certain way toward that other, and visa versa; likewise, one also believes one has a particular kind of relationship because of that trust, say a love relationship or close friendship, that is based upon experiences that are individually meaningful. Given the over-encompassing nature of this social constructivist perspective, this chapter will address the works of Niklas Luhmann, Georg Simmel and Adam Seligman in an attempt to further and more specifically investigate the basis for an interactional theory of trust. These works represent the most relevant works to date for our purpose, the development of an argument for the need for an interactionally based theory of trust. Hardin (1993), in his argument for a street-level epistemology of trust, states, “For this we require a theory that focuses on the individual and the ways the individual comes to know or believe relevant things, such as how trustworthy another person is” (p. 506). In this spirit, we attempt to develop an argument for the need for an interactionally based theory of trust.

### *Niklas Luhmann and Trust*

Trust is not the sole foundation of the world: but a highly complex but nevertheless structured conception of the world could not be established without a fairly complex society, which in turn could not be established without trust. (Luhmann, 1979: 94)

Luhmann’s (1979) primary thesis is that trust is a solution for the problem of complexity for both the individual and society. “The problem of trust therefore consists in the fact that the future contains far more possibilities than could ever be realized in the present and hence transferred into the past” (1979: 13). By reducing the world of possibilities of future action, that is, complexity, trust makes social action possible. One’s enactment of one of the possibilities of future action consequently determines the past. So trust is a description of the present



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