

SOC 105

It is hard to imagine a time in our evolutionary history where humans weren't as connected as we are today due to technological innovations. Connections among our early ancestors were made primarily for survival. This was until the further development of the neocortex, which enables us to form more abstract thoughts, and feel more complex and deeper emotions than fight or flight instincts. This was discussed by Maryanski and Turner in "Neurology of Religion", which led to the new human need to form emotional connections, and advance our sociality to allow for the collaborative activity and communication discussed in Fligstein and MacAdams' "Microfoundations". Religion resulted from the "collective consciousness" and our developed need to find meaning and cope with the darker consequences that come with higher-level thinking and processing.

Maryanski and Turner, along with Fligstein and MacAdams, argue that without the development of language, abstract and symbolic thinking would not have been possible. They reason that without language we would not have been able to communicate deeper reflections to each other, which created the collective consciousness that inspired formation of religions and belief systems. Language played a vital role in the development of abstract and higher-level thoughts among us, and Maryanski and Turner theorized that language allowed us to understand emotions as ways to categorize our thoughts. However, Fligstein and MacAdams argue that the human capacity for abstract thinking comes with its consequences. With the advent of these higher-level thoughts and communications, our ancestors had to cope with new existential fears about their purpose in the world and the meaning of every object or event in their lives. Fligstein and MacAdams go on to say that these fears were too overwhelming for an individual to handle

themselves and the world. The symbolic rituals and coordinated activity that came with religions enhanced sociality among us, but also quelled our own inner worries by drawing our attention to more hopeful implications of our meaning.

The collective consciousness, propelled by language capabilities, connected early humans and drove them into societies that represent modern humans. Religions today still serve the purpose of connecting us socially and shielding us from our deepest fears. Religion can even be considered a survival advantage. While it may not help us survive in our physical environment, religion has a beneficial effect in our mental environment, and can keep us grounded and focused on things in our environment that we can understand and control.