**SOC 3120 Social Psychology**

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**Lecture 11: The Self and Motivation:**

Two issues have been central to social psychologists' efforts to link conduct and the self: (1) how persons come to be what they are (i.e. acquisition of identities, identification with certain others, and how others' treatment affects self); and (2) the influence of the person's conceptions of self on conduct (i.e. do personal and social identity, others appraisals and expectations affect behavior).

**Motive and Motivation:**

Such questions cannot be pursued very far without talking about motives and motivation. As we seek to link self-conceptions to others' conceptions of the person, and both to conduct, we need some general organizational principles of conduct to explain why some persons act one way and some another, why some end up rich and successful, others as bums. Although a variety of social factors beyond the control of individuals come into play here, outcomes are not fully determined by them. Thus we need a way to discuss motive and motivation if we are to account for the directions taken by both self-concept and behavior.

Motivation refers to the forces, drives, urges, and other states of the organism that impel, move, push or otherwise direct its behavior. As most psychologists and many sociologists use it, motivation is usually invoked in an effort to explain the direction of a person's behavior as well as the amount of energy that seems to underlie it. To speak of behavior as "motivated" is often to explain it in relation to some specific organic drive (such as sex or hunger), to a conditioned response, to a stimulus, or to some generalized need or disposition of the organism.

While this concept is necessary, it is also conceptually problematic. It is tempting to link each act to an underlying motivation, but the motivational underpinnings of most human acts are more complex than they appear. Sure we eat because we are hungry, but do so in a specific manner for other reasons (e.g. we're bored, it's the conventional time to eat, we're trying a new diet to fit in with social appearance norms). Few acts can be explained by a single motivation. Because of this complexity, it is all to easy for observers to engage in motive mongering - substituting one's own account of what motivates conduct for the real circumstances that shape another person's conduct. Moreover, for S.I. to attempt to explain motivation in terms of innate drives would violate its whole foundational idea that people act on the basis of meanings.

Thus, S.I. has been wary of the concept of motivation. Yet, it has also found a way to discuss motivation related to the impulsive "I" phase of the act. In this approach, motivation refers to the sensitivity of the organism to the environment at a particular time. The organism contains a great many impulses, but at any moment some are more important than others. To be hungry is to be especially sensitive to food stimuli, and to notice them more readily. When this is the case, we can say that one is hungry.

This is a useful way of elaborating Mead's concept of the "I" and showing its relation to the "Me" in conduct. Many factors can influence the particular sensitivities of the person at a given time: organic states, previous conditioning, and the imagined responses of others to a completed or contemplated act. Such motivations operate at a preconscious level, and determine the impulse - but not the whole act. As a person experiences his or her own impulsive response, it becomes part of his or her "Me" - the person takes the attitudes of others toward the act. At this point, the determining influence of motivation temporarily ends, and the person can bring the act under voluntary control.

Motive, in contrast, refers to what people say about their conduct rather than to the forces that shape their impulses. In everyday speech, we often speak of why someone did what they did, explain to ourselves and others the reasons for our acts and what we hoped to gain from them. Such motives are verbal phenomena, existing as people talk about what they do. Motive is thus a concept closely linked with the "Me," for it points specifically to that act of self-reference in which the person seeks to explain and control his or her conduct.

Just as the "Me" is something to which the "I" responds, motives, which are our verbalized reasons for conduct, may become motivations. Verbalized motives may come to organize the sensitivities of the individual to the environment, particularly the social objects in it (e.g. snacking, explaining hunger as not having much dinner, recalling a snack before dinner, and then thinking if one ate fewer snacks, one would have less need for them). Here a verbalized motive has become a motivation that shapes subsequent impulse sensitivities. The "I" has responded to the "Me."

While we will take up this issue of verbalized motives later - particularly with regard to interrupted behavior and problematic situations, the focus today will be on motivation itself: the way in which identity, self-image, and self-esteem affect conduct at the impulse level.

The central principle we will espouse is that a person's conceptions of self influence motivation. They affect the state of the organism and impulsive responses to various objects and events. They affect its moods, emotions, and sense of competence. In turn, these affect conduct by shaping the person's sensitivities to the acts of others, to the world of objects, and to the person's own acts. How individuals respond to various circumstances at the level of impulse - the "I" - is affected by motivational states shaped by the self.

**Identity and Motivation:**

Generally, situated identity organizes a person's sensitivities to events in a given situation. Social and personal identity are more deeply rooted motivational states that shape the way we respond to situated roles and form situated identities.

Take a doctor and patient during a checkup. Each is motivated by either the "doctor" or "patient" identity. This is to say that of the large set of possible responses that each could make to the situation, a subset pertaining to the identity is selected and activated. The patient, for example, has a great many wants, needs, desires, and inclinations in their life, but only a limited subset is activated in his/her dealings with the doctor. Others are backgrounded for the time being (e.g. wanting a new home). Events relevant to the patient's health will be attended to closely, but not so much other concerns.

It is partly this capacity of an identity to organize one's attention and impulsive responses in a situation that accounts for its impact on conduct. Having assumed a particular role, one has an identity that organizes relevant impulses and excludes those less important to the activity at hand.

Ordinarily, the process whereby one assumes a role and its associated identity is a quick, almost unconscious one, and the identity itself becomes taken for granted. In the above example, the patient may have considerable consciousness of self, for s/he must interpret the doctor's directions and govern his/her conduct accordingly. But such consciousness tends to occur within the patient identity - one usually does not have to think much about the identity itself, only of the things one must do from its perspective.

Where people tend to become conscious of their situated identities is when they are uncertain or when they undergo change. A student used to doing well has hit a series of difficult courses and wonders whether s/he still can claim the identity of honours student; a young couple who are "just friends" slowly realize a romantic interest in each other, announcing it to themselves and others. When people consciously recognize their situated identities - whether by expressing doubts or announcing a new identity - they simultaneously reorganize or transform motivation (e.g. sexual impulses that were ignored or downplayed earlier become more salient). Also, characteristics of the other that were formerly unimportant become matters of intense interest as the couple plans a future together (e.g. religion, education, career plans, desire to have kids or not, etc.) Here, we can see how verbalized identities can shape motivation in ways we are scarcely aware of.

Beyond situated identity, social identity and personal identity also have significance as motivation and motive. A person doesn't ordinarily make each role with equal energy or define each situated identity as equally important to the self as a whole. One can prioritize one's family life but just do the bare minimum at work; do lots of volunteer work but minimize one's involvement in church. Some identities energize us more than others, and the force with which we act seems to depend on the identity that we have in a particular situation.

Situated identities are always linked to social and personal identities. If a person's social identity as an active member of many community organizations is highly important, particular situated identities will tend to engross the person to the extent to which they contribute to his social identity. S/he may respond to a chance to run for public office with greater enthusiasm than the chance to organize a kids’ play. If an academic, by contrast, either of these opportunities will present much less interest than a chance to organize a professional conference in one's area of expertise. We tend to choose situated identities depending on the way they contribute to our social and personal identities.

The effects of social and personal identities occur through both motivation and motives. We carry social and personal identities with us all the time, although well below the level of consciousness. These organize our receptivity to certain events (e.g. true crime authors' ears prick up at the news of a sensational crime; community leaders at word that a political office will be vacated; academics that research grants will become available in their area). One does not have to think of oneself in terms of writers, community leaders or academics at every moment. Since at some point along the way one of these self-objectification was made, it now shapes one's conduct - sensitivity - at the level of impulse.

Of course, under some circumstances people do make a point of announcing their personal and social identities or focusing on these inwardly. This is particularly so when such identities are socially devalued (e.g. the homeless). In such cases, attempts are made to maintain a positive sense of social or personal identity in the face of stigmatization (e.g. distancing themselves from other homeless people/institutions, making their situation into a virtue as best they can, or retreating into fantasy).

Yet it is not only social dislocation and derogation that bring social and personal identity to the fore. The performance of every situated identity carries some implications for the persons social and personal identity (e.g. sports or service clubs not only provide vehicles to assume situated identities, but to achieve particular success, distinction, and validation in those terms). Once becoming known for such accomplishments, this becomes a central feature of the person's social identity - a social identity that becomes situated in a wider community that takes note of - or immortalizes - such accomplishments.

In the above examples, personal and social identity motivate efforts to talk about situated identity and put it in the best possible light. This is true of either degraded selves attempting to preserve value for the self, or those engaging in exceptional performances that make a permanent place for oneself in the community.

We can also see personal and social identity erupting into conduct in Goffman's concept of role distance. Goffman noted that even in the midst of serious situated role performances (e.g. surgeons), people sometimes make light of their roles, act playfully, joke, and engage in self-depreciation. Such behaviors serve the function of easing tensions, enabling people to maintain high standards of performance without making the atmosphere oppressively heavy with sanctions. Humor, moreover, is an effective means of social control, a way to remind people of their responsibilities without directly accusing them of falling short.

Role distance also arises, however, because social and personal identity lie in the background of every act. If they seem to intrude just at the time where the person is deeply engrossed in the situated role, it may be because the situated identity is threatening to overwhelm the self. Joking around is one way of reminding self and others that there is more to the person than just the current situated identity.

Social identities can also come to the surface when an event occurs that is not relevant to the situated identity, but very significant to another particular social identity. I may be very engrossed in my situated identity of professor while giving this lecture, but if I suddenly hear somebody whisper a derogatory comment about my bald head, then I will suddenly become aware of my social identity of baldness, and respond on that basis, or in addition to my role as professor. I will become alert to further such expressions and begin to make the professor role with that underlying social identity in mind.

Each time one announces a social or personal identity, one reorganizes the self at a motivational level. One reorganizes one's impulses and alters the environment to which one will henceforth be sensitive. An announcement, for example, that one is leaving one's spouse as a result of cruelty not redefines the situation, and requires others to make adjustments, it also transforms the self. By announcing this, the person is seeking to rationalize subsequent conduct as much in his or her own eyes as in the eyes of others. This places different impulses in the forefront and downplays those pertaining to ongoing marital cohabitation.

**Self-Esteem and Motivation:**

Self-esteem also provides a major motivational link between the person and the social order. Social roles and group membership provide the contexts within which our situated identities occur and our social and personal identities develop. Hence, one of the major ways we secure self esteem is through our attachment to and identification with the social world. Humans seek positively valued identities. They look for ways of behaving that will not only enable them to secure their goals but also to earn the approval of others. Even when we appraise ourselves, we do so for the most part in relation to the standards or values of the community.

Yet it would be wrong to lay too much stress on the determining nature of group standards and judgements. S.I. stresses that humans are naturally active, self-conscious creatures who acquire some degree of autonomy along with the self. While we often act to earn the approval of others, or approve of ourselves because we act in ways that others would, we also develop individual goals and aspirations. We seek not only approved social identities and the belonging they bring, but personal identities that entail projects or goals of our own that put us in opposition to others. To some extent, human beings derive self esteem to the extent that their efficacy, their agency in pursuit of personal identity is successful.

Moreover, in their search for the positive appraisals of others, humans may consciously seek to deceive others rather than emulate them or live up to their expectations. Through a variety of techniques of impression management they may seek to present a self that seems to be what others wish it to be (e.g. younger, working hard, sincerely interested). In a variety of ways people seek to present a situationally or culturally appropriate self even though they are inwardly alienated from this. Sometimes they are so good at this act they even fool themselves (i.e. a false presentation of self becomes a genuine - believed - one).

Self-esteem is a product of our activities and our experiences with other people, but it is also something we bring to each new situation of social interaction. As such, it is a motivational state: affecting the way we are sensitive to others in the situations we find them.

One of the ways this works is through anxiety. Low self-esteem implies a high level of anxiety. People with low self-esteem exhibit more frequent reports of insomnia, nervousness, sweaty hands, etc. Such anxious symptoms are associated with low self-esteem, although they are not necessarily determined by it. Indeed, being anxious in response to uncertainty or danger, or being anxious about an exam may be helpful to a person's adjustment to particular situations as well.

Low self-esteem is also linked to clinical depression, a disorder of mood in which the person experiences feelings of sadness, lack of energy, hopelessness and worthlessness seemingly unrelated to events in their life (e.g. when things are otherwise going well). Again, like anxiety, depression may be a natural response to some circumstances, and may even be beneficial to a certain degree (e.g. it may help the bereaved by restricting their activities until they have recovered the capacity to act effectively). But in clinical depression, the link between events and feelings is lost.

Anxiety and depression are important motivational states. As a derivative of low self-esteem, anxiety sensitizes one to others in a particularly painful way, making one more vulnerable to the negative judgements and verbalizations of others, more likely to see others positively and oneself in a negative light. Depression has a similar effect, encouraging one to see the social world as a negative, unpleasant place. Anxiety and depression can work together to form a vicious cycle, with others' criticism being taken more seriously, self being more easily devalued, and the person becoming even more anxious and depressed.

Even if the person is motivated to behave in ways that will secure the approval of others, because low self-esteem promotes anxiety and depression, s/he may not be able to present a self that earns positive evaluations. These conditions make it more difficult to act in ways that present a favorable self to others - to show appreciation of others' qualities, to role-take accurately, etc. People with low self-esteem are caught between a desire to emulate others whose qualities they value and an inability to be like them.

Most people, of course, don't have genuinely low nor high self-esteem. But most have self-esteem high enough to keep anxiety from paralyzing them, while low enough to make them receptive to others' evaluations. Both exceptionally low and high self-esteem have important implications for the individual. At the low end, it makes it very difficult for the person to do things that would improve their lot. At the high end, however, it works to insulate the person from the appraisals of others (e.g. a person with such high self-esteem may select out images of others in such a way that only favorable conclusions about self can be reached - regardless of the feelings of others). Such people often fall beyond the control of others' judgements.

Our discussion of self and motivation has largely ignored the larger social context in which identity and self-esteem operate. Yet people are not free to do as they see fit. Realistically the others with whom we interact, the identities that are available, and the conduct that is possible are strongly influenced by culture and society. In the next class we will complete our account of the person by addressing this topic.