**SOC 3120: Social Psychology**

**Prof. J.S. Kenney**

**Overheads Lecture 12: The Self and Social Order**

\* Cultural and social factors restrict nature/development of self:

- identities only partly chosen

- interactants only partly chosen

- conflicting expectations/community influences

- nature of modern life

\* Two opposing ways people come to enact roles:

(1) Ascription: being assigned a role by others

- born with (e.g. sex/race)

- assigned (e.g. religion)

- gender particularly significant (e.g. may override other factors)

(2) Achievement: voluntarily assumed/attained

- occupation/education

- still limited for many (e.g. economic/racial barriers)

\* Situated/biographic identity in many ways outside one’s control (e.g. gender/ race/class discrimination).

\* Even achieved roles constrain/shape self:

- foregone opportunities

- investment of time, money and effort

- web of social contacts sustains

- personal identity/self-esteem wrapped up in role

**Limitations on the Choice of Others:**

\* Social life limits person’s choice of other interactants (e.g. a child’s parents, gender, race, original socioeconomic status).

\* Over lifetime, one encounters a series of unchosen others who one must interact with (e.g. teachers).

\* Ongoing social order contains attitudes into which person born, and confronts individual as real/ objective/ must be dealt with.

\* To know self, must know person’s location in social order.

\* Existing social world influences self-conceptions through valued self-presentations in specific contexts.

**Conflicting Selves:**

\* In a complex society, what parents may expect does not necessarily coincide with what teachers and peers do.

\* Results in conflicts between selves/ others / necessitates impression management.

\* Ideal conceptions of self in different groups linked to similarities within and differences without.

\* Other problems arise from inability to meet expectations, unreasonable or unclear expectations.

\* Sometimes no presentation of self can be arranged that will adjust to others’ expectations.

\* In such cases, one can:

- dismiss negative assessments as irrelevant

- make a virtue out of what is maligned

- withdraw from emotional attachments

\* However, there are dangers:

- Some negative others must be endured (e.g. teachers/employers)

- New doubts raised where none before

- Shrinking circle of confirming others.

\*Limitations on the choices of stories that we may narrate about ourselves in various social settings.

\*Culture provides guidance in the kind of narratives we can acceptably relate.

**Community and the Generalized Other:**

\* Self is constrained because people are members of groups, organizations and communities.

\* Classic sociological conception of community:

-territorially based

-similarity of members

-powerful generalized other= the community

- common standards and values

- confining world of conformity/familiar activities

- well-developed social identities/ integrated successive “Me’s”

- constrained personal identities

\* Modern complex societies:

- fundamental disagreements over values, beliefs and expectations

- inequalities based on many factors

- multicultural/competing social groups

- specialized division of labour

- limited basis for role-taking of generalized other (e.g. state/society)

- many generalized others / person changes these as move between

contexts

**The Person in Modern Society:**

\*Modern society shapes new kinds of selves/individual relationships to society

\* Unlike classic communities (self-sufficient societies unto themselves), modern communities are:

- economically interdependent

- interact with outsiders

- aware of broader society

- aware of outside opportunities

- based more on personal identification than territory

- likely to be geographically dispersed

- less likely to involve frequent personal interaction

\* Modern self:

- not taken for granted/grounded in group

- more self-consciously constructed/chosen/maintained

- focus on personal identity/wants as locus of “real self,” not what

dictated by community

\* Some Patterns:

-Attempts to reconstruct the past

-Lives constructed around social movements

-Tenuous identification with several communities

-Moving between community identifications over time

-On margins of several can’t fully identify with or ignore

-Inability to find community identification

\* Where community identification is less than total, personal identity becomes more salient part of self (e.g. autonomous goals, ambitions, dreams and projects).

\* Some carry to extreme; most balance social and personal identity.

\* Modern self not just social product, but found, constructed, or cultivated.