**SOC 3120 Social Psychology**

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**Overheads Lecture 14.1**: **Aligning Actions:**

\* Today focus is on aligning actions in problematic situations

\* People’s fundamental interactional task: coordinating conduct through:

- role taking /making

- definition of situation

- shared stock of knowledge

\* This process is more complex than what appears at first glance:

1. People perform acts that others do not expect;

2. The self is an object in every interaction;

3. Culture and its objects constrain every social encounter.

\* These complications necessitate *aligning actions*: verbal efforts to create correspondence between:

-substance of interaction

- selves of participants

- shared culture

\* These involve techniques people use to talk about - and deal with - unexpected and problematic behavior

\* Each type= a technique for maintaining interaction and the self while defining conduct in culturally acceptable/meaningful terms.

**Motive Talk:**

\* Talk about motives is:

- a key organizing feature of everyday life

- a major way in which problematic occurrences are handled.

\* Motive talk arises when someone questions a line of conduct

\* Responses: imputation, avowal, or announcement of a motive

\* Purpose: to explicate purpose and consequences of conduct

\* Problematic behavior often seen as atypical

\* Questions about motives challenge

- self/identity

- relationship between act/culture

\* Motives offered designed to:

- explain problematic act

- repair person’s identity

- find cultural support/justification

\* Vocabularies of motive (Mills):

- learned

- socially differentiated

- regarded as appropriate specific situations or classes of situations

- treated as more or less legitimate by various social groups

\* Different specific vocabularies of motive for specific groups/ situations:

- help explain compartmentalization of lives

- helps explain how groups attract/ instill loyalty in members

- helps explain group conflicts

**Disclaimers:**

\* *Disclaimers* (Hewitt & Stokes):

-verbal devices used to ward off the negative implications of an impending act (e.g. “I’m not prejudiced, but...”)

- introduces/guides the way for a contradictory statement

- if accepted:

-allows conduct to proceed

-leaves identities unchallenged

-aligns conduct with culture

\* Disclaimers prospective aligning actions: attempts to control definition of situation and identities of those present in advance

**Accounts:**

\* Retrospective aligning actions called *accounts* (Scott and Lyman):

- volunteered or demanded (explicitly or implicitly) after problematic behavior has already occurred

\* Two general types:

(1) Excuses

(2) Justifications

\* *Excuses* are accounts in which one admits that the act in question is inappropriate but denies full responsibility (e.g. “It was an accident”). These:

- acts as social lubricant to prevent arguments

- help maintain situations/identities

- preserve rules and standards

\* *Justifications* are accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it (e.g. “No harm was done”). These:

- also lubricate social interaction

- attempt to protect identity

- one basis for flexibility in rule application

\* If accounts fail, a person’s identity may be negatively transformed

(e.g. as deviant)

**Other Aligning Actions:**

\* Apology: aligning action where person admits act wrong, was their responsibility, and expresses remorse:

- pays homage to cultural values

- attempts to maintain interaction by assuaging anger

- attempts to restore good identity of offender

- places fate in hands of person offended

\* Aligning actions can also focus on desirable acts (e.g. Going “beyond the call of duty” at work and helping someone out). These also:

- may be unexpected

- have to be assimilated into definition of situation

- alter established identities

- contrast with assumed cultural objects

\* In such situations, people may verbalize:

- *entitling acclaimers*: (e.g. “Remember I was there for you when others didn’t care”)

- *enhancing acclaimers:* (e.g. “You’d have been in real trouble with

the boss without my help”

\* Acclaimers represent efforts to:

- maintain interaction flow

- sustain or enhance identities

- link conduct to important cultural objects

\* Acclamers also:

- illustrate how aligning actions involved in negotiating meaning

- audience may well resist such definitions to avoid debt

\* Next class, we will look at emotions and constraints in social interaction.