**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.