**SOC 3120: Social Psychology**

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**Overheads Lecture 4: The Chicago and Iowa Schools**

\* Contemporary S.I. has many variants:

- Chicago and Iowa schools

- Dramaturgical sociology

- Ethnomethodology

- Phenomenology

\* Today we discuss the Chicago vs. the Iowa school

\* Following G.H. Mead’s death, two approaches emerged:

- Chicago School (Herbert Blumer): *idiographic* approach:

unique subject matter necessitating humanistic methodology

- Iowa School (Manford Kuhn): *nomothetic* approach: stresses unity of scientific method and need for generalization

\* Three major methodological differences:

(1) Relative merits of phenomenological vs. operational approaches

(2) The appropriate techniques of observation

(3) The nature of concepts best suited to analysis of behavior

**Phenomenological vs. Operational approaches**:

\* Blumer:

- doubtful of strict scientific approach given limit set by individual interpretation

- stressed “getting inside actors worlds” to see as they do/understand meanings they act upon

- favored sympathetic interpretation/understanding/*verstehen*

\* Kuhn:

- sought to operationally “empiricize” Mead’s ideas/ avoid non-

empirical/non-testable concepts

- originated “self-theory”: an attempt to come up with overt

behavioral indices of covert behavior

**Appropriate Techniques of Observation:**

\* Blumer:

- criticized quantitative/experimental research as distorting social

reality “from the outside”

- articulated link between interpretive tradition and ethnographic

research

- Proposed use of participant observation, qualitative interviews,

case studies, life-histories, and documentary research

\* Kuhn:

- criticized above techniques as time-consuming /unsuitable for

comparison, generalization, and theory testing

- adapted quantitative/survey techniques to measure self-attributes

- most notable innovation: twenty statements test (TST)

**Appropriate Concepts for Analysis of Human Behavior:**

\* Blumer: “sensitizing concepts”: not what to see but where to look

\* Kuhn: explicitly operational definitions of concepts (e.g. “Self” = answers people give to TST).

**Free Will vs. Determinism**

\* Chicago school: behaviour = an interplay between the spontaneous and socially derived, the “I” and “me” (not strictly determined/ predictable)

\* Iowa School: behavior is socially determined by actors’ definitions/ therefore predictable (exclusive focus on the “me”)

\* Chicago school: self and society seen in processual terms

\* Iowa school: self and society seen in *structural* terms

\* Chicago school: behavior “constructed” in reflexive, interpretive manner involving self-interaction (e.g. considering the best way to act)

\* Iowa School: typical behavior “released” from pre-existing psychological structure by environmental triggers

\* Chicago school: emphasis on role-making/joint actions

\* Iowa school: emphasis on role-playing/implementing pre-established lines of action

\* Ultimately:

- Blumer’s image of humans dictates his methodology

- Kuhn’s methodology dictates his image of humans

\* Since these pioneers did their work, attempts have been made to bridge the gap between the Chicago and Iowa Schools

\* We will now look at two of these:

(1) David Lewis’ reinterpretation of Mead’s “I”/theory of action

(2) Carl Couch’s “New Iowa School”

**David Lewis: A Social Behaviorist Interpretation of the Meadian “I”**

\* Blumer and Kuhn’s approaches intimately associated with their interpretations of Mead’s “I”

\* Lewis objects to both, and posits a third

\* Previous interpretations:

(1) *Remedial* interpretation: avoiding social determinism (Blumer)

(2) *Residual* interpretation: no legitimate purpose: merely a way of explaining unpredictable behavior (Kuhn)

\* Lewis’ textual analysis: both are wrong: the “I” is a *response* to a significant symbol which calls out an attitude and a plan of action

\* Important distinction made between deterministically taking the social attitude and the organism’s ultimate, overt response

\* Feedback mechanisms intervene: *covert responses*, or a series thereof, comprise self-interaction. Self-conscious individuals may evaluate and modify their ultimate, overt responses

\* Redintegration: one’s “I” response is then incorporated into one’s “Me”

\* This interpretation is closer to Mead’s intention, and one far more open to empirical application

\* In this regard, Lewis next turns to elaborating Mead’s theory of social action

\* Social actions occur in interlocking series of symbol-attitude-response

\* Lewis identifies four phases that can be extended further both theoretically and for future research:

(1) *From symbol to attitude*: deterministically produced (future research could focus on mode of communication and its environment);

(2) *The first feedback phase*: covert communication with oneself (future research could focus on habits, closure, and feedback imagery);

(3) *From attitude to response*: release of considered attitude into overt response (research potential limited);

(4) *The final feedback phase*: definition and evaluation of overt response by self and others: (physically, interactionally, and in terms of the generalized other). This “redintegration” could be studied in terms of congruence or incongruous feedback inputs re: the original symbols and attitudes.

\* Steps (1) and (3) are essentially mechanical processes, but (2) and (4) involve moments of self-conscious reflexivity. These latter two phases promise to be most fruitful for theory and research.

**Couch, Katovich and Buban:** **Beyond Blumer and Kuhn:**

\* Couch et.al. argue that the Chicago school embraced social process while the Iowa school rejected it:

- Blumer insisted on analysis of ongoing joint actions across time

- Kuhn focused on static representations of selves at a particular point in space and time

\* Both earlier approaches contributed to “New Iowa School” synthesizing “best of both traditions”:

(1) Focus on social processes over time: selves as agents

(2) A stable methodology (controlled observation of a point in

social space)

\* New Iowa School focuses on detailed analysis of social processes over time using audiovisual technology

\* Goal: to isolate generic social processes/ formulate general principles

\* Example: “Openings Study” studied aligning personal acts & delineated 6 necessary generic elements:

-co-presence -shared focus

-reciprocal acknowledged attention -social object

- mutual responsiveness -congruent identities

\* Many interactionists lukewarm to this approach. Reasons:

- distrust of the laboratory as source of realistic “high fidelity”

concepts vs. the social world itself (“artificiality”)

- danger of scripting forthcoming activity

\* Authors’ respond that ethnographic work too descriptive such that:

- generic social processes get lost in the detail

- perceptions change with the location

\* Authors’ argue that videotaping in lab minimizes these problems, and that individuals’ responses are still real and freely engaged in within the situations they are presented with

\* Participant creativity cannot be suppressed, but controls are necessary to enable manageable data collection (e.g. prior agreements to interact regarding a particular issue and not others)

\* Videotaping phenomena enables researchers to go over data again and again/avoid “immaculate perceptions” of ethnographers reconstructing data from memory

\* Sometimes this approach has been extended to natural settings (i.e. once concepts developed in lab, cameras taken to natural settings to test)

\* Ultimately, this approach combines Blumer’s focus on social processes, Kuhn’s methodological rigor, and modern technology

\* Rationale: Fewer methodological problems trying to gain understanding in simplified environments than attempting to simplify processes in complex environments