**SOC 3120: Social Psychology**

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 **Overheads Lecture 6: Basic Concepts of Symbolic Interactionism II:**

 **Self, Roles and Definitions of Situations**

 Today we will examine the following key concepts:

1. Self

2. Roles and Definitions of Situations

 **1. Self:**

\* S.I. uses this term both in relation to:

(1) The self as a social object; and

(2) The self as a process through which that object is created.

 **(i) Self as Object:**

\* Humans can be objects to themselves.

\* Possible through: - inhibited responses/organized acts

 - symbolic designation of others and self

 - internalization of social group/process

 - internal representation of acts/responses

 - imagination/consideration of various scenarios

 - interaction with named self

\* Significance: - more precise and flexible coordination of group

 activities

 - better control of own acts

 - increased competitive advantage

\* We experience self-designation/interaction daily (e.g. thought)

\* Mind= the incorporation of the social process within the organism

 = a form of behavior like any other/depends on symbolic capacity

\* Self: - arises when people mind themselves

 - is always an object that figures in one’s conduct.

 - does not simply refer to body/ structure in the mind

 - includes intangibles (roles, character traits, emotional types)

 - an object created/recreated as we act toward it

 **(ii) Self as Process:**

\* Mead’s distinction between “I” and “Me” = phases of self:

 - “I” = self as acting subject

 - “Me” = self as social object

\* Related to phases of act:

(1) - adjustment disturbed: impulsive/unorganized tendency to act = “I”

 - must become aware of before designating object/appropriate action

(2) - imagination of other’s attitudes/likely response (“Me”)

 - take account of self as social object

 - adjustment of impulsive act in turn

\* “I” and “Me” continually alternate in ongoing conduct (one incorporated into the other over time)

 - enables control over conduct

 - process of self-formation at work in internal conversation/planning

 - involves emotional as well as cognitive processes

 - enables self-presentation, novelty in conduct (not just conformity)

 - e.g. imperfect impulse control/misperceptions/non-conformism

 **(2) Roles and Definition of Situations:**

\* Social coordination depends on self-objectification. This is linked to:

 (1) The definition of the situation; and

 (2) Social roles.

 **(i) Situations:**

\* Conduct usually occurs in well-known situations with a familiar configuration of acts and objects.

\* *Definition of the situation:*

 - an overall grasp of the nature of a particular setting, the activities

 taking place, the objects to be sought, and others present

 - an organization of perception in which people assemble objects,

 meanings and others and act toward them in a coherent, organized

 way.

 - when available, people act on this basis.

 - when unavailable, they work to establish one first in setting.

 - important tool (framework) in human capacity to view self as object.

 - organized in terms of roles (e.g. who does what)

 **(ii) Role:**

\* Common social science concept: 2 usages:

 (1) Conventional:

-a cluster of duties, rights and obligations associated with a particular social position.

 -emphasis on the reciprocal normative requirements of

 complementary roles (e.g. husband-wife; teacher-student).

-the role provides people with a script to play - and live up to.

\* Problematic because:

 - exaggerates importance of conforming to norms

 - downplays more common attention to objects

 - difficult to effectively and comprehensively describe

 (2) Interactionist:

 - focuses on creative/pragmatic capacities

 - roles come from defining situation at hand

 - organized/fluid set of possible patterns of behavior

 - role as interpretive resource/brought to life in action

 on joint goals

 - perspective from which conduct constructed

 - roles restrict us, but we also actively structure them

 - roles as process more important than role as structure

\* Definitions of situations and their associated role structures provide humans with two important capacities:

 1. The capacity to anticipate or predict the actions of others with whom

 we interact (e.g. in a doctor’s office);

 2. The capacity to make sense of the actions of others, even when we

 don’t anticipate them (e.g. an unexpected physical examination).

\* Also enables us to grasp own behavior/ imagine alternatives.

\* Multiple roles have multiple implications for behavior.

  **(iii) Role Making and Role Taking:**

1. *Role making*: the process wherein the individual constructs activity in situations to fit the definition of the situation, their role, and meshes with the activity of others;

2. *Role taking*: the process wherein the person imaginatively occupies the role of another, looks at self and situation from that vantage point in order to engage in role making.

\* These processes are linked/cannot occur without each other.

\* Distinct from role-playing and role enactment

 - flexibility/creativity instead of predetermined script.

 - involve self-conscious activity

  **(iv) Role Taking as a Generalized Skill:**

\* Human beings don’t only see things from the vantage points of others’ roles. Also:

 -the definition of the situation itself

 -role structure

 - generalized perspectives of the groups to which we belong

 (the “generalized other”)

\* Take the role of the generalized other: broader community or societal expectations and values.

\* Such standards, expectations, principles, norms and ideas held in common often vary in our multicultural society.

\* Reference groups illustrate one not need be a member to adhere to standards

  **(v) The Place of Emotions:**

\* Position cognitive so far. Yet emotions significant in:

 - self

 - definition of situation

 - role making

 - role taking

 - calculation/coordination of acts

\* Emotion: common sense definitions =

 -feelings

 -irrational

\* Sociological view:

 - emotions may also accompany/support cognition/effectiveness

 - a byproduct of viewing self as object

 - emotions embedded in social life/meaning

\* In the sociological view, emotions have two major components:

1. Physical sensations

2. Names or labels (shaping or determining them).

\* Controversy over relative importance of each component.

\* Kemper: compromise position: 4 primary emotions (fear, anger, depression and satisfaction) with:

(i) evolutionary significance;

(ii) grounded in different and identifiable physiological states;

(iii) appear relatively early in the development of the individual; and

(iv) appear in every culture.

\* Secondary emotions grounded in primary, but depend on shared social expectations rooted in cultures.

\* Emotions result from social interaction. Three facts are important here:

 (1) Emotions naturally arise in our efforts to complete individual and

 social acts.

 (2) Experience of emotions experiences of self.

 (3) Emotions are a regular part of the role making process..