**SOC 3120: Social Psychology**

**Prof. J. Scott Kenney**

**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..