**SOC 3120 Social Psychology**

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**Overheads Lecture 7: The Self and Its Social Setting I:**

 **The Acquisition and Presentation of Self**

\* Today we review two matters related to the human ability to see oneself as a social object:

1. The acquisition of self

2. The presentation of self

 **The Acquisition of Self**:

\* No self exists at birth

 - Can’t designate self as object symbolically

 - Capacity exists to respond to environment/learn

 - Others act toward symbolically/interpret/ satisfy needs

 - Interaction one-sided

 - Significant differences in 5-6 years. How?

\* Physiological/ psychological development/ learning provide capacities for

 development of self

 **Language and the Self:**

\* Language is crucial in two ways:

 (1) It provides a system of names for self and others enabling group participation/incorporation;

 (2) It provides labels for other important objects/ environment

 **Learning the Social World:**

\* Children born into/confronted with social world/relationship networks:

 - Relationships/individuals named

 - Vast array of objects

\* Children learn to make/associate sounds with sensations/ others

\* Significant early discoveries:

 (1) Things have names;

 (2) The child discovers that s/he has a name (signals dawn of self)

\* Must still learn language/ procedures for reference to self/others:

 - Complexities of names/titles/nicknames

 - Complexities of personal pronouns

 - Complexities of social relationships/perspectives

 - Gendered aspects of social world

\* As child masters, relationships can be better represented internally

 - Social world gradually incorporated into self symbolically

 - Increases capacity for both self-control/ social control

 - The more adept at role taking, the more successful role maker

 **Learning the Culture:**

\* Learning language:

 - Opens up group membership

 - Enables naming/designation of objects in environment

 - Helps socialize into common culture/ social position

 - Enables understanding of “thing of names” (i.e. intangibles)

- Enables understanding of various actions related to objects (e.g. multiple meanings/possible actions)

- Links words with deeds, objects, and range of possible social acts in child’s world

\* Self as object:

 - Above applies to self as object as well (how acted toward by others

 affects how acted toward by self)

 - Others’ beliefs and attitudes important

 - Beliefs about child’s characteristics/traits rooted in:

 (1) History of family interaction with the child

 (2) Wider culture

 - Despite defences and some autonomy, self as object heavily

 influenced by how viewed by others

 - Role taking key process: adopting others’ perspectives toward self

 - How developed?

 **Stages of Socialization:**

\* Two stages of socialization: (1) Play

 (2) the Game

\* Play stage: - Imitating roles observed in others

 - Self imagined as possible objects with various

 meanings

 - Simultaneous shaping of self

 - Knowledge of roles imperfect/incomplete

 - Still incapable of more organized activities

\* Game stage: - Complex role taking in coordinated activities (e.g. team sports)

 - Able to see self/position from position of wider

 group/ each member

 - Taking role of “generalized other” gives self unity

\* Ultimately: -Acquisition of self sequential process

 -Hard to specify ages (historical/cultural variation)

 -Certain individuals have more influence (parents)

 -Not all sources/individuals consistent (parents/peers)

 -Child chooses to emphasize one/minimize another

 -Socialization not one-way process

-Interpretation/ testing limits/agency involved in child socialization/development

 -Socialization never ends/ part of entire life

 **The Presentation of Self**

\*We now turn to consider the dramaturgical sociology of Erving Goffman

\* Main ideas:

 - When humans interact, each desires to manage/control the

 impressions others receive of him/her

 - Using metaphor of theatrical performance for life: people put on

 a “show” for others

 - Use of terms like “performances, parts, routines, settings, props,

 front and back stage”

\* Outcome of each performance: an *imputation* by the audience of a *particular kind of self* to the actor:

 - This helps define the situation

- It is to the individual’s advantage to present self in ways that best

 serves his/her ends (e.g. getting others to voluntarily do what you

 want is the effective test)

 - The self becomes largely an object about which an actor wishes

 to foster an impression

\* Different aspects of theme elaborated by Goffman:

1. Human beings strive to interact in ways that maintain both their own "face" and that of other interactants;

2. Deference conveys regard and respect; demeanour = the means through which the actor creates an image of him/herself for others;

3. The social function of embarrassment is the demonstration that the face-losing actor is at least disturbed by it and may prove more worthy another time;

4. Misinvolvements (i.e. ways in which an actor may lose his/her involvement in a conversational encounter) violate the social requirement that interactants must elicit and sustain spontaneous involvement in a shared focus of attention;

5. Symptoms of mental illness may be seen as failure to conform to the tacit rules of decorum/ demeanor regulating interpersonal "occasions";

6. Actors, like gamblers, knowingly take avoidable risks, which represent special opportunities to establish and maintain face;

7. "Role distance" is the discrepancy between the actor's role prescriptions and role performance.

\* Goffman’s analysis of “total institutions” (e.g. prisons/mental hospitals) is important:

 - Minor contingencies/accidents may trigger “betrayal funnel”

 leading to incarceration;

 - Through humiliations/degradation ceremonies residents’

 dignity/self-worth stripped away/ they are put in dependent

 position;

 - Residents, for a time, need not seek “new cover”: can be

 “shameless”;

 - Nevertheless, residents use self-presentation to work system to

 their advantage.

\* Goffman’s late work on “frame analysis:”

 - “Strips” = slices from stream of ongoing social activity;

 - “Frame analysis”= strips cut from flow characterized by

 definitions of the situation and related to intersubjective,

 organizational principles of social knowledge;

 - Individuals utilize these through “keying” and “fabrication” (both

 to deceive self and others);

 - Distinction between idealized reality and “more grubby real

 reality”

 - Self not an entity half-concealed behind events, but a changeable

 formula for managing oneself during them

  **Theoretical Affinities, Critiques, and Legacies:**

\* Goffman’s work has similarities with:

 -Chicago school (methodology; rejection of determinism; focus on

 agency and originality). Yet contributed, for first time, a focus on

 impression management;

 - Ethnomethodology (recognizes many “taken for granted” norms

 escape notice until violated).

\* Criticisms of Goffman:

 - No explicit theory (in traditional sense)

 - Little accumulated evidence (except anecdotal)

 - Few testable propositions (but provocative insights)

 - Overgeneralization

 - Less need of performances given increasing social informality

 - Limited focus on narrow area of face to face interaction

 - Ignoring what actors are doing/task or accomplishment aspects of

 social action

 - Focus on how to succeed in structures of unequal power, with

 little emphasis on the structures themselves

 - A sordid, disenchanting view of humans and their society

\* Goffman’s Legacy (among other things):

 - Scott and Lyman’s “Accounts”

 - Hewitt and Stoke’s “Disclaimers”

 - Taylor’s work on rhetoric and motivation

 - Clark’s work on “emotional micropolitics”

 - Mangham and Overington’s “Organizations as Theatre”

 - Armies of public relations staff, advertizing executives,

 counsellors, consultants and “Spin doctors”

 - Public cynicism and insecurity