**SOC 3120 Social Psychology**

**Prof. J. S. Kenney**

**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