**SOC 3120 Social Psychology**

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**Overheads Class 8:**

**Self & Social Setting II: The Person, Identity & Self-Esteem:**

**\*** Symbolic interactionists see the self as a primarily social experience.

\* We begin by elaborating 2 fundamental ideas relating person/social world:

1. *The self is a social object:*

- A joint, not just an individual creation.

- An object existing in social space, not just within the person.

2. *The self is both a situated object and a biographical object:*

- An object constituted by role-taking/making in specific situations

- Also sum total of one’s situations/encounters with others through life

**Identity**

* Identity focuses on how people locate themselves in social life. Humans are role-taking and role-making creatures stressing social groups, similarities and differences.
* In interaction, people take the roles of others towards themselves, and, as such, become objects to themselves and others.
* People make *announcements* of their own situated identities and the *placement* of others to simplify this process for each other.
* Usually there is a joint focus on congruent announcements and placements, mutually acknowledgment of presence, and mutual acceptance of each other’s right to be in the situation and make certain requests.
* Situated Identity = “a coincidence of placements and announcements.”

**The Experience of Situated Identity**

* Once situated identities are established, they provide the taken for granted context within which people act.
* In this, the definition of the situation establishes a shared framework of roles for constructing one’s conduct and interpreting that of others.
* However, problematic situations arise where there is no alignment, no integration of placements and announcements. (e.g. interruptions, distractions, stresses, things we forget).
* The fact is, people make mistakes, misjudge responses, or sometimes are unable to respond as expected.
* Similarly, others may act towards us on the basis of placements we don’t immediately recognize.
* Announcements and placements thus do not always coincide, and when they do not, the potential for disrupted or paralyzed social interaction is considerable.
* Often in such situations people comment in such a way that they name the situated identity they seek to recover.

**Social and Personal Identity**

* Identity isn’t just a simple product of situated roles in immediate situations.
* Our sense of social location is anchored in a variety of situations and roles that links us to (and differentiates us from) various wider groups and collectivities.
* Two additional concepts help expand our understanding of other, more enduring forms of identity:

1. *Identification:* refers to a community, the set of real or imaginary others with whom the person feels a sense of similarity, identification, attachment, and common purpose.

This is best seen as a by-product of social interaction, of shared definitions of the situation, of similarity and common purpose. Both an emotional/cognitive experience.

2. *Differentiation:* entails an individual perspective, a feeling that the person has a particular part to play with others, that s/he is in some ways distinctive, and that there are individual goals worth pursuing.

* Both processes are part of a healthy social bond.
* Situated identities feed into all of this, but some situations are more suited for identification than differentiation.
* Ultimately, people develop a sense of themselves as whole beings (integration) acting purposefully and effectively in their social world (continuity) by developing forms of identity that transcend a particular situation.
* *Social identity* locates the person in a social space larger and more enduring than any particular situation.
* Identification also transmutes social categories into functional (if not necessarily functioning) communities.
* Social identity also enables the differentiation of self from others, even while identifying with them. Similarly, identification with a given community serves as a means to differentiate oneself from people who are not members
* Social identity, like situated identity, also relies on the announcement/ placement process. It is more than a private, subjective experience, indeed does not exist until others place him/her in it.
* While announcements typically precede placements, the reverse can also be true.
* In rare cases, social identity can emerge without specific placements and announcements.

**Personal Identity**

* By stressing the individual’s life story, *personal identity* locates the person in a social space that is larger and more enduring than any particular situation.
* It stresses both uniqueness and difference, the person’s construction and maintenance of a life story that is continually being updated.
* This personal identity typically has several main themes that give meaning to a person’s actions. It involves a sense of ownership of “the self.”
* Yet personal identity also rests at some point on the person’s participation in a cultural world shared with others. A person must have achieved something in interaction with others over a period of time.
* Personal identity thus depends on announcements and placements just like situated and social identity.
* The 3 forms of identity we have discussed - situated, social, and personal - are not mutually exclusive.

**Self-Image: Knowing the Self**

* A situated identity enables the person to know where s/he stands in relation to *others*.
* One or more social identities tell the person where s/he is placed in the *social world*.
* Personal identity provides a basis for knowing oneself as a person with a *life story* and who has goals or qualities for distinguishing one from others.
* *Self-schema*: a concept used to study self-knowledge - how people know themselves, what they know, and how they use this knowledge.
* A schema= “cognitive generalization about the self, derived from past experience, that organizes and guides the processing of self-related information contained in the individual’s social experiences.”
* Individuals who see themselves as possessing a particular trait are said to be “*schematic*” for that trait. Those for whom a particular trait is unimportant are conversely termed “*nonschematic*.”
* A self-schema contains information about an object (the self), ideas about how the object is put together and functions, and examples of the object (e.g. intelligent, stubborn, unconventional, compassionate, rebellious, etc).
* The person can have ideas about how these things do or do not fit together.
* A self-schema may also contain images of an ideal self, perhaps also images of others whom the person idealizes.
* Self-schemas “theorize” the self just as schemas in general theorize the external world.
* They combine categories, abstract ideas, and propositions about how things relate to one another for practical reasons.
* Self-schemas reduce the incoming flow of information to manageable dimensions, helping people make sense of themselves so that they can decide how to act.
* Being schematic on a particular trait is like being an expert in a field. The sociological significance of self-schemata is in how they influence perceptions and facilitate conduct involving the self.

**Self-Esteem:**

* Identity not just cognitive, but emotional feelings of self as object.
* Self-esteem = the affective (emotional) dimension of self-objectification.
* Aroused as we attend to ourselves/ see ourselves as we imagine others do.
* A complex product of coordinated social activity/ role-taking/making.
* C.H. Cooley: Looking glass self (3 parts):

(1) The imagination of our appearance to another person

(2) The imagination of his/her judgement of that appearance

(3) Feelings of pride/shame

* Perceived importance of other person has significant effect on self-esteem.
* Self-objectification also important (e.g. own comparisons to others).
* Appraisal of one’s own expectations:

William James: Self esteem = successes

aspirations

* Self-esteem a product of situations/person’s reflections over time/ choices to emphasize or downplay certain things
* Identity and self-esteem have implications for motivation (next class).