**SOC 3120 Social Psychology**

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**Overheads Lectures 9-10: Individuality/Identity**

\* Today and next class we will delve more deeply into two related questions:

(1) What is the meaning of individuality?

(2) What does it mean to have a distinct identity?

\* We deal with these using four sources:

(1) Classical writers (Mead vs. Simmel)

(2) Sheldon Stryker (“Identity Theory”)

(3) Ralph Turner (“The Real Self”) and

(4) Yours truly (“Cross cultural” aspects of self)

**(1) Classical Writers:**

\* Mead/Simmel’s differing conceptions of individuality result from differing views of relationship between individual and society:

- Simmel: -Dialectical relationship

-Not necessarily harmonious

-Operation of developed individual

-Individual both inside and outside society confronting it

- Mead: -Dialogical relationship

-Cooperative

-Developmental model

-Individual has unique pattern from ‘standpoint’ in

society

\* Simmel: -Focus on form (type) and content

(interest/drive/motive) in sociation

-Differention drive may be satisfied by similarities/

contrasts with others in group

-Individual surrounded by concentric circles with

double meanings: (1) what common; (2) what

distinguishes

-Problems: development; cooperation; downplays

emotion

\* Mead: -Self develops in communication/cooperative

activities

-Two aspects of individuality (1) I/ me; (2) unique

standpoint of self in social process

- Problems: oversocialized; “I” ambiguous;

overemphasizes cooperation; downplays

emotion

**Sheldon Stryker: Identity Theory:**

\* Central ideas: - “Commitment impacts identity impacts role

performance”

- Identities are the subjective aspects of roles

- Identities are ranked in a hierarchy of importance

- Relative commitment/identification with identities

determines behavior

- Heavy focus on positivism/ methodology/

hypothesis testing

\* Distribution of identities in hierarchy reflect commitment to various social roles

\* Commitment reflects institutional, organizational, and stratification features of society reflected in social networks

\* Choices among behaviors reflect relative hierarchical identity position

\* This approach criticized as:

- Overly determinative/ dismissive of agency

- Unidirectional in emphasis (structure to self)

- Simplistic

\* Stryker responds by focusing on:

- Determination (answers with “probabilities”)

- Multidirectional relationship between role performance/ identity

salience

- Reconceptualizing commitment/identity salience relationship

(interactional/affective commitment)

- Incorporating emotions/master statuses/personal traits into

formulation

- Do these elaborations really answer critics (???)

- Is individuality really a matter of one’s “unique pattern” of

identities, in a particular salience hierarchy, situated in a unique

structural context?

**Ralph Turner: “The Real Self: From Institution to Impulse”**

\* How do we recognize our real selves?

\* Idea of self as object enables us to distinguish between feelings/actions

- Some peripheral (take little credit/blame)

- Some central (embodying “true self”)

\* One’s “true self” may be seen as feelings/actions related in varying degrees to: (1) institutions; or (2) impulses

\* Crucial differences between these:

- Standards of behavior reveal differently

- Discovery vs. attainment of self

- Control vs. lowered inhibitions

- Differences in idea of hypocrisy

- Qualities of an admirable performance

- temporal perspective (present vs. future)

- individualism has different meanings

\* Contemporary trend is away from an institutional focus and toward an impulsive one (e.g. 1960's, Freud, literature, child rearing, changes in responses to TST)

\* Four explanations:

(1) Changing cultural definitions of reality (institutional religion

giving way to relativism/diversity);

(2) Shift away from production to consumption orientation;

(3) Increased deprivation caused by impulse suppression/ growing

contradictions in society;

(4) Institutional order becoming characterized by disorder/

undependability while society opens up more routes for

impulse gratification

\* This trend has implications for conceptions of social structure, role behavior, norms and values, emotion, ritual, and social control

\* Sociologists writing from a structural perspective (e.g. Stryker) may miss implications

**J.S. Kenney**

**"The Varying Structure of the Self Across Cultures:**

**A Preliminary Analysis"**

\* My attempt to develop framework to understand self across cultures

\* Three interlocking/interpenetrating dimensions of self:

(1) Lateral dimension (“I” and “Me”) (*Lewis’ interpretation)*

(2) Vertical dimension (Identity hierarchy w/o Stryker’s

determinism)

(3) Moral dimension

\* Organization/integration of self by symbolic universals. Aspects:

Perception: Implicates relationships

Typifications

Limits alternatives

Leads to appropriate response

Perceptions unconsciously structure boundaries of response

*Perceptual beliefs* structure *form* of role/identity (subject

matter/types of social relationship)

*Evaluative beliefs* provide the *content*

Together map out the generalized other (salience hierarchy exists

both *between* and *within* roles)

\* Cross-culturally: (1) Durkheim’s “mechanical solidarity”:

- Fewer institutional roles/shared beliefs

- Content more interpersonally complex (e.g. kinship)

(2) Durkeim’s “organic solidarity”:

-More institutional complexity/diverse beliefs

-This comes to structure interpersonal complexity

\* Illustrations:

1. Hunter-gatherer, agricultural and indigenous societies (relative institutional simplicity and interpersonal complexity);
2. India: metaphysical ideas structure self: relatively uniform/ adaptable in organizing traditional interpersonal and

increasing institutional complexity

1. Japan: perceptual/evaluative beliefs reify roles/downplay

individualism: cut across roles /adapted to modern life

1. China: Confucian perceptual/evaluative beliefs traditionally

downplayed individual self re: kin group/ bifurcation with

those born after the revolution (more Western individualism/

institutional focus)

\* Ultimately, this model provides theoretical framework for analysing/ comparing self (and “individuality”) across cultures.