

Social Interaction

- Social interaction is a generative and active process
 - It requires attention and input even though we are “physically here”
- The actions of other people will to some extent determine our own actions/ response to a situation
- How we make sense (meaning) of situations
- There are broader theoretical and philosophical aspects to social interaction and how meaning is socially created
- Symbolic Interaction (Herbert Blumer)
- Social Constructionist Paradigm (Berger and Luckman)
- Dramaturgical Paradigm (Irving Goffman)

- Symbolic Interactionism
 - Can focus on body language
- Micro level in focus/analysis - everyday interactions between people
- Symbolic? Gestures (thumbs up, waving) , words that we speak, facial expression, body language, spatial proximity and distance

- Herbert Blumer 1900-1987
- Student of G.H. Mead at U. of Chicago
- Key theorist and proponent of symbolic interactionism until Irving Goffman in the 1960s
- How meaning is co-constructed between people in the process of interaction
- Meanings of things are absolutely central to understanding social action of humans

- The 3 premises of symbolic interactionism (according to Blumer)
 - 1: Human beings act towards things on the basis of meanings that the things have for them.
 - What things? People, institutions, physical objects, abstract principles etc
 - i.e. things that exist in the world outside of us
 - 2: These meanings are derived from (or arises out of) the social interactions between people (general agreement)
 - 3: These meanings are modified through (mediated) an interpretive process used by the persons in dealing with the thing/situation encountered

- The source of meaning?
 - Human self
 - Symbolic interactionists says: This is a chair, and nothing else
- Q: Are things inherently meaningful?
- Can things have meaning based on their qualities? Objective?

- The meaning we ascribe to furniture? - something about the thing itself that provides or creates that meaning
- During the interactional process meaning is something not simply obvious and evident
- Arrived at through a process of interpretation -then consensus or disagreement

Interactional process

- Meaning is something not simply obvious and evident
- Arrived at through a process of interpretation then consensus or disagreement (going back into the bathroom is the disagreement)
- When we interpret a situation we are not simply reading the established meanings but also generating meaning too and deciding on subsequent action
- [just for laughs](#)
- Thomas Theorem
- “If a person defines a situation as real it is real in its consequences”
- Giant mutant spider dog video- Girl defined the animal as real, more serious implications
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoB8t0B4jx4>
- More broadly - Definitions of deviance?
- If something is defined as deviant, it is real in its consequences?
- Homosexuality was illegal therefore considered “deviant”, it is no longer recognized as so by the majority of society
- What we agree to as ‘real’ can/does have consequences for other people and vice versa

The power of norms and the power of who gets to define

The Social Construction of Reality

- “It is our contention, then, that ... sociology ...must concern itself with whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such 'knowledge'...”
- need to deal with huge problems of defining reality
- How we understand things and treat them as real
- Not only empirical types of 'knowledge', more interested in knowledge of ideas people carry of the world around us
- Practical embodied knowledge of the social world (ex. How you greet someone appropriately)
- Greeting another person (knowledge and practice)
- Examples of other types of knowledge:
- Media images (people, places, situations, things)- media presentation
- Media representation - how people, places, situations, things, are re-presented to audiences

- Stories about our personal experiences with people, places, situations and things
- ...and in so far as all human 'knowledge' is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, ... sociology ... must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted 'reality' congeals for the man in the street...
- ... in other words, we contend that ...sociology ...is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality.” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966 p15)
- The processes by which any body of knowledge comes to be socially established/taken for granted as 'reality'.
- 'Makes sense' / self-evident
- Society (norms, values, ideas, institutions, practices) is not a given, fixed 'thing'- it is socially produced, reproduced and changed
- We bring into play a range of different background knowledges (practical and ideational) into our social interactions with other people
- Presuppositions: a priori tacit acceptance of what is real/true/meaningful
- Stereotypes: typification of individuals/groups that is inaccurate, oversimplified

Erving Goffman (micro -level/situational)

- Dramaturgical approach- art of theatre production, not sociological term, a word from theatre, you have something to do with the script, the scene, the writing, you control the play
- Dramaturgy is the art of theatre production
- Social interaction is a kind of theatrical stage where we 'perform' our social statuses and roles together
- Social statuses and roles- your position in relation to a broader range of relationships
- Status and Roles
- Status- To indicate the social position of someone within a network of social relationships
- Facebook - what is your relationship status?
- Marital/Civic status
- Status Set-our collections of statuses
- Roles - recognizable/expected patterns of social behavior indicating a persons status/position
- Role Set-our collections of roles
- How we know about and interact with people, how we know how to behave in situations, what to expect from other people in a given situation.
- Institutionally defined status and roles

- Teacher / student
- Calling in sick to work/school- changed status and changed role?
- Negotiating/figuring out changing family roles and statuses can be quite complex
- Step-mom, step-dad, half-brothers /sisters, step brothers/sisters

- Goffman - We act as observers, actors and directors of our own social performances (interactions)
 - Front stage and back stage
 - The front stage:
 - Where the social performance (interaction) takes place
 - The backstage- managerial part of us that works ‘behind the scenes’
 - Performances are not always perfect - ‘gaffes’

- ‘face work’ (Goffman)
 - We have a ‘face’ for every status and social role
 - Face = a version of ourselves that we present to others
 - Consistency between the impression you give to people and the perception they have of you.
 - Predictability of social interactions and roles and statuses

- Everyone have a range of face work strategies
 - ‘Losing face’ (e.g. ‘fail videos’ on Youtube)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zd7c5tQCs1I>
 - ‘Maintaining face’
 - ‘Saving face’
 - We always seek to impression manage in social situations

Signs Assignment

- CULearn - in the ‘written assignments’ link
- Detailed instructions on what to do, requirements, grading rubric

- Sample essay with in-text pointers and tips