

SYMBOLS, POWER AND POLITICS (STUDIES IN SOCIOLOGY: SYMBOLS, THEORY AND SOCIETY) pdf

1: Symbolic Interactionism | www.enganchecubano.com

The volume is the first one in the series Studies in Sociology: Symbols, Theory and www.enganchecubano.com authors from Australia, Finland, Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, who contributed to it, are sociologists bound by a conviction that the study of the social context of making use of symbols cannot be underestimated.

Theoretical Perspectives on Government and Power Understand how functionalists, conflict theorists, and interactionists view government and politics French sociologist Emile Durkheim, often called the Father of Sociology, viewed government as interdependent with other parts of society. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons Sociologists rely on organizational frameworks or paradigms to make sense of their study of sociology; already there are many widely recognized schemas for evaluating sociological data and observations. Each paradigm looks at the study of sociology through a unique lens. The sociological examination of government and power can thus be evaluated using a variety of perspectives that help the evaluator gain a broader perspective. Functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism are a few of the more widely recognized philosophical stances in practice today. Functionalism According to functionalism, the government has four main purposes: According to functionalism, all aspects of society serve a purpose. Functionalists view government and politics as a way to enforce norms and regulate conflict. Functionalists see active social change, such as the sit-in on Wall Street, as undesirable because it forces change and, as a result, undesirable things that might have to be compensated for. Functionalists seek consensus and order in society. Dysfunction creates social problems that lead to social change. For instance, functionalists would see monetary political contributions as a way of keeping people connected to the democratic process. This would be in opposition to a conflict theorist who would see this financial contribution as a way for the rich to perpetuate their own wealth. Conflict Theory Philosopher and social scientist Karl Marx was a seminal force in developing the conflict theory perspective. He was a proponent of conflict, in general, because he felt that it was the only means of promoting positive change for the underprivileged. Drawing on powerful ideas already explored by Mills and Marx, Domhoff pointed out uncomfortable realities about the American political and social systems. Today Domhoff is still a vocal participant in the field of sociology, publishing current books, teaching in the University of California system, and maintaining a website that offers a sampling of his professional work and studies on topics related to sociology. His theories describe the members of the power elite maintaining their position by collectively following the same social patterns, such as vacationing at a handful of destinations, joining elite clubs, and attending select schools. He also pointed out that the existence of a power elite stands in contrast to an important American ideal: Domhoff acknowledges that all Americans can potentially exert political influence, but he asserts that our current social and political systems make it easier for the wealthiest citizens to shape policy. Conflict Theory in Action Although military technology has evolved considerably over the course of history, the fundamental causes of conflict among nations remain essentially the same. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons Even before there were modern nation-states, political conflicts arose among competing societies or factions of people. Vikings attacked continental European tribes in search of loot, and, later, European explorers landed on foreign shores to claim the resources of indigenous groups. Conflicts also arose among competing groups within individual sovereignties, as evidenced by the bloody French Revolution. Nearly all conflicts in the past and present, however, are spurred by basic desires: According to sociologist and philosopher Karl Marx, such conflicts are necessary, albeit ugly, steps toward a more egalitarian society. Marx saw a historical pattern in which revolutionaries toppled elite power structures, after which wealth and authority were more evenly dispersed among the population, and the overall social order advances. In this pattern of change through conflict, people tend to gain greater personal freedom and economic stability Modern-day life is not without a multitude of political conflicts: Indeed, the study of any given conflict offers

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a window of insight into the social structure of its surrounding culture, as well as insight into the larger human condition. Many current American conflicts are concentrated internally. The United States the government, for instance, has almost shut down because Republicans and Democrats could not agree on budget issues. This conflict continues to be at the center of American politics. Similarly, over the last few years the philosophical differences between the Democratic and Republican parties have remained on the forefront. Frustration with the traditional two-party system helped to spawn the formation of the Tea Party, a grassroots movement with a strong conservative and libertarian bent. What symbols of the Boston Tea Party are represented in this painting? How might a symbolic interactionist explain the way the modern-day Tea Party has reclaimed and repurposed these symbolic meanings? Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Symbolic Interactionism

Other sociologists study government and power by relying on the framework of symbolic interactionism, which is grounded in the works of Max Weber and George H. Symbolic interactionism, as it pertains to government, focuses its attention on figures, emblems, or individuals that represent power and authority. Many diverse entities in larger society can be considered symbolic: Images that represent the power and authority of the United States include the White House, the eagle, and the American flag. The Seal of the President of the United States, along with the office in general incites respect and reverence in many Americans. Symbolic interactionists are not interested in large structures such as the government. As micro-sociologists, they are more interested in the face-to-face aspects of politics. In reality, much of politics consists of face-to-face backroom meetings and lobbyist efforts. What the public often sees is the front porch of politics that is sanitized by the media through gatekeeping. Symbolic interactionists are most interested in the interaction between these small groups who make decisions, or in the case of some recent congressional committees, demonstrate the inability to make any decisions at all. The heart of politics is the result of interaction between individuals and small groups over periods of time. These meetings produce new meanings and perspectives that individuals use to make sure there are future interactions. Summary Sociologists use frameworks to gain perspective on data and observations related to the study of power and government. Conflict theory, rooted in Marxism, asserts that societal structures are the result of social groups competing for wealth and influence. Symbolic interactionism examines a smaller realm of sociological interest: Section Quiz Which concept corresponds best to functionalism?

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2: Symbols and Language in Human Culture

Symbols, Power And Politics (Studies in Sociology: Symbols, Theory and Society) by Elzbieta Haas, September , Peter Lang Pub Inc edition, Paperback in English.

Durkheim held the belief that culture has many relationships to society which include: Logical " Power over individuals belongs to certain cultural categories, and beliefs such as in God. Functional " Certain rites and myths create and build up social order by having more people create strong beliefs. The greater the number of people who believe strongly in these myths more will the social order be strengthened. Historical " Culture had its origins in society, and from those experiences came evolution into things such as classification systems. Max Weber Weber innovated the idea of a status group as a certain type of subculture. Status groups are based on things such as: These groups live a certain lifestyle based on different values and norms. They are a culture within a culture, hence the label subculture. Weber also purported the idea that people were motivated by their material and ideal interests, which include things such as preventing one from going to hell. Weber also explains that people use symbols to express their spirituality, that symbols are used to express the spiritual side of real events, and that ideal interests are derived from symbols. Georg Simmel For Simmel, culture refers to "the cultivation of individuals through the agency of external forms which have been objectified in the course of history. Sociological concept and analysis can be viewed. The elements of culture[edit] 1. Any thing that carries particular meaning recognized by people who share the same culture. A system of symbols that allows people to communicate with one another. Culturally defined standards of desirability, goodness, beauty and many other things that serves as broad guidelines for social living. Specific statements that people hold to be true. Rules and expectations by which a society guides the behaviour of its members. The two types of norms are mores and folkways. Mores are norms that are widely observed and have a great moral significance. Folkways are norms for routine, casual interaction. The typical manner in which people perform production e. Distinct material objects, such as architecture, technologies, and artistic creations. Patterns of organization and relationships regarding governance, production, socializing, education, knowledge creation, arts, and relating to other cultures. Anthropology[edit] In an anthropological sense, culture is society based on the values and ideas without influence of the material world. Human nature is the organism living inside of that shell. The shell, culture, identifies the organism, or human nature. Culture is what sets human nature apart, and helps direct the life of human nature. Anthropologists lay claim to the establishment of modern uses of the culture concept as defined by Edward Burnett Tylor in the mid 19th century. Descent groups across the island claim parts of the land, and to back up those claims, they tell myths of how an ancestress started a clan and how the clan descends from that ancestress. Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown[edit] Main article: His research showed that group solidification among the islanders is based on music and kinship, and the rituals that involve the use of those activities. In the words of Radcliffe-Brown, "Ritual fortifies Society". Marcel Mauss Marcel Mauss made many comparative studies on religion, magic, law and morality of occidental and non-occidental societies, and developed the concept of total social fact , and argued that the reciprocity is the universal logic of the cultural interaction. He searched the universal principals of human thought as a form of explaining social behaviors and structures. Bourdieu characterizes social relations in the context of what he calls the field , defined as a competitive system of social relations functioning according to its own specific logic or rules. The field is the site of struggle for power between the dominant and subordinate classes. It is within the field that legitimacy "a key aspect defining the dominant class" is conferred or withdrawn. To explain this concern, Bourdieu explains habitus and field. Habitus explains the mutually penetrating realities of individual subjectivity and societal objectivity after the function of social construction. It is employed to transcend the subjective and objective dichotomy. Trans-cultural diffusion The belief that culture is symbolically coded and can thus be taught from one person to another means that cultures, although bounded, can change. Cultures are both predisposed to change and resistant to it. Resistance

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can come from habit, religion, and the integration and interdependence of cultural traits. Cultural change can have many causes, including: Several understandings of how cultures change come from anthropology. For instance, in diffusion theory, the form of something moves from one culture to another, but not its meaning. For example, the ankh symbol originated in Egyptian culture but has diffused to numerous cultures. Its original meaning may have been lost, but it is now used by many practitioners of New Age religion as an arcane symbol of power or life forces. A variant of the diffusion theory, stimulus diffusion, refers to an element of one culture leading to an invention in another. Contact between cultures can also result in acculturation. Acculturation has different meanings, but in this context refers to replacement of the traits of one culture with those of another, such as what happened with many Native American Indians. Related processes on an individual level are assimilation and transculturation, both of which refer to adoption of a different culture by an individual. Griswold outlined another sociological approach to cultural change. Griswold points out that it may seem as though culture comes from individuals "which, for certain elements of cultural change, is true" but there is also the larger, collective, and long-lasting culture that cannot have been the creation of single individuals as it predates and post-dates individual humans and contributors to culture. The author presents a sociological perspective to address this conflict. Sociology suggests an alternative to both the view that it has always been an unsatisfying way at one extreme and the sociological individual genius view at the other. This alternative posits that culture and cultural works are collective, not individual, creations. We can best understand specific cultural objects The logic is a bit circular, but illustrates how culture can change over time yet remain somewhat constant. It is, of course, important to recognize here that Griswold is talking about cultural change and not the actual origins of culture as in, "there was no culture and then, suddenly, there was". Because Griswold does not explicitly distinguish between the origins of cultural change and the origins of culture, it may appear as though Griswold is arguing here for the origins of culture and situating these origins in society. This is neither accurate nor a clear representation of sociological thought on this issue. Culture, just like society, has existed since the beginning of humanity humans being social and cultural. Society and culture co-exist because humans have social relations and meanings tied to those relations e. Culture as a super-phenomenon has no real beginning except in the sense that humans homo sapiens have a beginning. This, then, makes the question of the origins of culture moot "it has existed as long as we have, and will likely exist as long as we do. Cultural change, on the other hand, is a matter that can be questioned and researched, as Griswold does. Culture theory[edit] Culture theory, developed in the s and s, sees audiences as playing an active rather than passive role in relation to mass media. One strand of research focuses on the audiences and how they interact with media; the other strand of research focuses on those who produce the media, particularly the news.

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3: Culture and Society Defined

Studies in Sociology: Symbols, Theory and Society Edited By Elzbieta Halas and Risto Heiskala "The series has been created by Elzbieta Halas and Risto Heiskala in order to stimulate and develop cooperation in research on the meaning, forms and functions of symbolism in society.

Its origins and development in Hegel, Marx and contemporary thought. Arato, Andrew and Eike Gebhardt eds. The Essential Frankfurt School Reader. Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action. On the Logic of the Social Sciences. Introduction to Critical Theory. University of California Press. Critical Debates, edited by J. A philosophical inquiry into Freud. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society. Hegel and the rise of social theory. A Method for the Study of Small Groups. Berger, Joseph, Cecilia L. Hamit Fisek, and Robert Z. Berger, Joseph, Bernard P. Cohen, and Morris Zelditch. Status Characteristics and Social Interaction. Exchange and Power in Social Life. Social Exchange in Developing Relationships. Toward a Structural Theory of Action. Foundations of Social Theory. Sociological Perspectives, edited by M. American Sociological Review Social Psychology Quarterly What counts in attributions for exchange outcomes? Molm, Linda and Karen S. Satisfaction in power-dependence relations. Lovaglia, and Jeffrey Erger. An Extension of Network Exchange Theory. Gender and other nominal characteristics. Power Politics in American Marriage. Theories of Social Exchange. Convergences between two theoretical perspectives. Thomas, and Morris Zelditch, Jr. Sociological Theory - Wellman, Barry and Scot Wortley. Community Ties and Zelditch, Morris, Jr. Edited by Edward J. University of Massachusetts Press. Butler, Judith and Joan W. Feminists Theorize the Political. An Overview of Contemporary Theories. An Unexploited Gold Mine of Possibilities. Opportunity of Pitfall, edited by Jerald Hage. The Reproduction of Mothering. Society, the person and sexual politics. Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. From Margin To Center. Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale. This Bridge Called My Back. Feminist Theory and Dialectical Logic. The Politics of Reproduction. Sociological Theory Smith, Dorothy. The Conceptual Practices of Power. The Everyday World as Problematic. Narrative and the Social Constitution of Identity. Holy Men and Big Guns: The Can[n]on in Social Theory.

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4: Sociology of culture - Wikipedia

What is symbol? Sociological definition of symbol. Example & pronunciation of symbol. Free online sociology dictionary & OER.

Symbolic Interactionism Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective on self and society based on the ideas of George H. Mead , Charles H. Cooley , W. Thomas , and other pragmatists associated, primarily, with the University of Chicago in the early twentieth century. The central theme of symbolic interactionism is that human life is lived in the symbolic domain. Symbols are culturally derived social objects having shared meanings that are created and maintained in social interaction. Through language and communication, symbols provide the means by which reality is constructed. Reality is primarily a social product, and all that is humanly consequential—self, mind, society, culture—emerges from and is dependent on symbolic interactions for its existence. Even the physical environment is relevant to human conduct mainly as it is interpreted through symbolic systems. Blumer, who did much to shape this perspective, specified its three basic premises: The focus here is on meaning, which is defined in terms of action and its consequences reflecting the influence of pragmatism. The meaning of a thing resides in the action that it elicits. For example, the meaning of "grass" is food to a cow, shelter to a fox, and the like. In the case of symbols, meanings also depend on a degree of consensual responses between two or more people. The meaning of the word husband, for example, depends on the consensual responses of those who use it. If most of those who use it agree, the meaning of a symbol is clear; if consensus is low, the meaning is ambiguous, and communication is problematic. Within a culture, a general consensus prevails on the meanings associated with various words or symbols. However, in practice, the meanings of things are highly variable and depend on processes of interpretation and negotiation of the interactants. The interpretive process entails what Blumer refers to as role-taking, the cognitive ability to take the perspective of another. The determination of meanings also depends on negotiation—that is, on mutual adjustments and accommodations of those who are interacting. In short, meaning is emergent, problematic, and dependent on processes of role-taking and negotiation. Most concepts of symbolic interactionism are related to the concept of meaning. If situations are defined as real, they are real in their consequences. The definition of the situation emphasizes that people act in situations on the basis of how they are defined. The definitional process involves the determination of relevant identities and attributes of interactants. If, for example, a teacher defines a student as a slow learner based on inaccurate information , her discriminatory behavior e. This process, in combination with interactionist ideas about self-concept formation, is the basis of the labeling theory of deviance. Labeling theory proposes that a key factor in the development of deviants is the negative label of identity imposed on the person e. Defining a situation is not a static process. An initial definition, based on past experiences or cultural expectations, may be revised in the course of interaction. Much of the negotiation in social situations entails an attempt to present the self in a favorable light or to defend a valued identity. Self- Concept Formation Along with symbols, meaning, and interaction, the self is a basic concept in symbolic interactionism. The essential feature of the self is that it is a reflexive phenomenon. Reflexivity enables humans to act toward themselves as objects, or to reflect on themselves, argue with themselves, evaluate themselves, and so forth. This human attribute al-though dolphins and the great apes show some evidence of a self as well , based on the social character of human language and the ability to role-take, enables individuals to see themselves from the perspective of another and thereby to form a conception of themselves, a self-concept. Two types of others are critical in the development of the self. The significant other refers to people who are important to an individual, whose opinions matter. The generalized other refers to a conception of the community, group, or any organized system of roles e. Cooley proposed that to some extent individuals see themselves as they think others see them. Self-conceptions and self-feelings e. Within contemporary symbolic interactionism, this process is called reflected appraisals and is the main process emphasized in the development of the self. The self is

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considered a social product in other ways, too. The content of self-concepts reflects the content and organization of society. This is evident with regard to the roles that are internalized as role-identities. Roles, as behavioral expectations associated with a status within a set of relationships, constitute a major link between social and personal organization. Sheldon Stryker proposes that differential commitment to various role-identities provides much of the structure and organization of self-concepts. To the extent that individuals are committed to a particular role identity, they are motivated to act according to their conception of the identity and to maintain and protect it, because their role performance implicates their self-esteem. Much of socialization, particularly during childhood, involves learning social roles and associated values, attitudes, and beliefs. Initially this takes place in the family, then in larger arenas. The role identities formed early in life, such as gender and filial identities, remain some of the most important throughout life. Yet socialization is lifelong, and individuals assume various role identities throughout their life course. The self is highly active and selective, having a major influence on its environment and itself. When people play roles, role-making often is as evident as is learning roles. In role-making, individuals actively construct, interpret, and uniquely express their roles. When they perceive an incongruity between a role imposed on them and some valued aspect of their self-conception, they may distance themselves from a role, which is the disassociation of self from role. A pervasive theme in this literature is that the self actively engages in its own development, a process that may be unpredictable.

Divisions Within Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is not a homogeneous theoretical perspective. Although interactionists agree that humans rely on shared symbols to construct their realities and on the methodological requirement of understanding behavior by "getting inside" the reality of the actor, substantial divisions remain within this perspective. The main division is between those who emphasize process and those who emphasize structure in studying human realities. The former, associated with Blumer and known as the Chicago School, advocates the use of qualitative methods in studying the process of reality construction within natural social settings. The latter, associated with Manford Kuhn and labeled the Iowa School, advocates the use of quantitative methods in studying the products of social interaction, especially self-concepts. Both of these orientations to symbolic interactionism are evident in marriage and family studies, although the structural orientation predominates.

Symbolic Interactionism and Family Studies

Symbolic interactionism has been an important theoretical perspective in family studies since its early development in the 1950s and 1960s. LaRossa and Reitzes' study focused on the adjustments and transformations in personality and family patterns in the Polish peasant community in the course of immigration to the United States during the early 1900s. Processes of socialization, adaptation, definition formation, role-making, and self-concept development were major themes in their analysis. Ernest Burgess, however, was the first to call for the systematic application of "processual" symbolic interactionism to family studies. He proposed that the family can be viewed as "a unity of inter-acting personalities" — a little universe of communication in which roles and selves are shaped and each personality affects every other personality. It is impractical for most family researchers to study whole family dynamics over time. Another pioneer in the symbolic interactionist approach to family research was Willard Waller. Waller used qualitative methods. His principle of least interest suggests that the person least interested in or committed to the marital or dating relationship has the most power in that relationship and frequently exploits the other. The theme of conflict and exploitation was prominent in his analysis of college dating patterns in the 1950s. Much contemporary family research from a symbolic interactionist perspective deals with some type of role analysis, such as how the roles of husband and wife are defined during stages of family life; how gender role conceptions affect the definitions of spousal roles; how the arrival of children and the transition to parental roles change role constellations and interaction patterns; how external events. The concept of role is also important for most of the major sociological perspectives. The symbolic interactionist perspective emphasizes the processes of role-making, role definition, role negotiation, and role identity within the family.

Hochschild A large area of symbolic interactionist research deals with socialization — the processes through which personalities and self-concepts are formed, values and attitudes are transmitted, and the culture of one

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generation is passed to the next. The socialization of children is one of the few remaining and the most critical functions of the family in modern societies. It has received considerable attention from researchers. A symbolic interactionist perspective on child socialization encompasses a broad range of processes and outcomes involved in integrating the newborn into its family and society. Most of the socialization research has focused on the development of some aspect of the self. The high levels of reciprocity characteristic of family socialization processes and a hallmark of symbolic interactionism are rarely reflected in family research, although researchers are increasingly sensitive to it. A focus on reciprocity is more evident in research where identity negotiation is problematic, as in the case of lesbian motherhood Hequembourg and Farrell or in the case of immigrant families where parents and children must renegotiate their roles in unfamiliar cultural contexts Hyman and Vu. In addition to pursuing traditional interests in family studies, mostly in the United States, symbolic interactionists are increasingly pursuing cross-cultural and international research. In the area of self and identity, for example, Steve Derne shows how male filmgoers in India use their interpretations of Western films to both maintain and enhance their sense of male privilege. This research demonstrates how, when exposed to cultural perspectives that may threaten their own self-concepts or ethnic identities, people engage in interpretive processes that serve to incorporate these ideas into existing self-structures. Research in Nigeria Rotini has shown how car ownership, an influential status symbol, shapes personal interactions among the owners of different types of cars and how the infiltration of new technologies into cultures can alter role-relations in social institutions such as the family, law, and religion. Cross-cultural research also explores how family relations are conducted within specific ethnic domains, and how the cultural contexts in which communication occurs shape family interactions and identity negotiations Luo and Wiseman. Mzobanzi Mboya, for example, offers a compelling study of the ways that the self-concepts of South African adolescent schoolchildren are related to their perceptions of parental behavior. Broadly speaking, social movements, national dilemmas, international conflict, and the flow of international immigrants frame the symbolic domains in which families live. Immigrant families and children encountering cultures and lifestyles that are vastly different from their own struggle to realize new opportunities and to maintain their own ethnic identities and integrity Zhou. Conclusion Many areas of family research reflect symbolic interactionist ideas, often in diffuse and diluted form. For instance, in much of the research on marital satisfaction, marital quality, patterns of dating and mating, and various family-relevant attitudes. Although this may hinder the development and refinement of symbolic interactionism, it can also be viewed as an indication of the success of this theoretical perspective—that many of its concepts and ideas have become a part of the common wisdom of family studies.

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5: CULTURAL SYMBOLS: Teaching the Confederate flag - Sociology Toolbox

Cultural symbols and the meanings applied to them are not fixed in time. Within sociology, there is no single agreed upon definition of culture and its processes, but most definitions include a reference to culture being dynamic - that is not static. In my Introduction to Sociology class, I have.

Although Mead taught in a philosophy department, he is best known by sociologists as the teacher who trained a generation of the best minds in their field. Strangely, he never set forth his wide-ranging ideas in a book or systematic treatise. After his death in , his students pulled together class notes and conversations with their mentor and published *Mind, Self and Society* in his name. Finally, society, according to Mead, is where all of these interactions are taking place. Given that Blumer was the first to use symbolic interaction as a term, he is known as the founder of symbolic interaction. According to behaviorism , Darwinism , pragmatism , as well as Max Weber , action theory contributed significantly to the formation of social interactionism as a theoretical perspective in communication studies. People thus do not respond to this reality directly, but rather to the social understanding of reality ; i. This means that humans exist not in the physical space composed of realities, but in the "world" composed only of "objects". Three assumptions frame symbolic interactionism: Self-concept is a motivation for behavior. A unique relationship exists between the individual and society. Having defined some of the underlying assumptions of symbolic interactionism, it is necessary to address the premises that each assumption supports. According to Blumer, there are three premises that can be derived from the assumptions above. Essentially, individuals behave towards objects and others based on the personal meanings that the individual has already given these items. Blumer was trying to put emphasis on the meaning behind individual behaviors, specifically speaking, psychological and sociological explanations for those actions and behaviors. Their "response" is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Symbolic interactionists describe thinking as an inner conversation. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process [11] used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. We naturally talk to ourselves in order to sort out the meaning of a difficult situation. But first, we need language. Before we can think, we must be able to interact symbolically. Role-taking is a part of our lives at an early age, for instance, playing house and pretending to be someone else. There is an improvisational quality of roles; however, actors often take on a script that they follow. Because of the uncertainty of roles in social contexts, the burden of role-making is on the person in the situation. In this sense, we are proactive participants in our environment. Participant observation allows researchers to access symbols and meanings, as in Howard S. Because of this close contact, interactions cannot remain completely liberated of value commitments. In most cases, they make use of their values in choosing what to study; however, they seek to be objective in how they conduct the research. Therefore, the symbolic-interaction approach is a micro-level orientation focusing on human interaction in specific situations. Five central ideas[edit] There are five central ideas to symbolic interactionism according to Joel M. It is the constant search for social interaction that leads us to do what we do. Instead of focusing on the individual and his or her personality, or on how the society or social situation causes human behavior, symbolic interactionism focuses on the activities that take place between actors. Interaction is the basic unit of study. Individuals are created through interaction; society too is created through social interaction. What we do depends on interaction with others earlier in our lifetimes, and it depends on our interaction right now. Social interaction is central to what we do. If we want to understand cause, focus on social interaction. The human being must be understood as a thinking being. Human action is not only interaction among individuals but also interaction within the individual. It is not our ideas or attitudes or values that are as important as the constant active ongoing process of thinking. We are not simply conditioned, we are not simply beings who are influenced by those around us, we are not simply products of society. We are, to our very core, thinking animals, always conversing with ourselves as we interact with others. If we want to understand cause, focus on

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human thinking. Humans do not sense their environment directly, instead, humans define the situation they are in. An environment may actually exist, but it is our definition of it that is important. Definition does not simply randomly happen; instead, it results from ongoing social interaction and thinking. The cause of human action is the result of what is occurring in our present situation. Cause unfolds in the present social interaction, present thinking, and present definition. It is, instead, social interaction, thinking, definition of the situation that takes place in the present. Our past enters into our actions primarily because we think about it and apply it to the definition of the present situation. Human beings are described as active beings in relation to their environment. Words such as conditioning, responding, controlled, imprisoned, and formed are not used to describe the human being in symbolic interaction. In contrast to other social-scientific perspectives humans are not thought of as being passive in relation to their surroundings, but actively involved in what they do. Snow, professor of sociology at the University of California, Irvine, suggests four broader and even more basic orienting principles: Snow uses these four principles as the thematic bases for identifying and discussing contributions to the study of social movements. Human agency Human agency emphasizes the active, willful, goal-seeking character of human actors. The emphasis on agency focuses attention on those actions, events, and moments in social life in which agentic action is especially palpable. Interactive determination Interactive determination specifies that understanding of focal objects of analysis, whether they are self-concepts, identities, roles, practices, or even social movements. Basically this means, neither individual, society, self, or others exist only in relation to each other and therefore can be fully understood only in terms of their interaction. Symbolization Symbolization highlights the processes through which events and conditions, artifacts, people, and other environmental features that take on particular meanings, becoming nearly only objects of orientation. Human behavior is partly contingent on what the object of orientation symbolizes or means. Emergence Emergence focuses on attention on the processual and non-habituated side of social life, focusing not only on organization and texture of social life, but also associated meaning and feelings. The principal of emergence tells us not only to possibility of new forms of social life and system meaning but also to transformations in existing forms of social organization. Studies encompassed discursive communities ; [16] [17] identity ; [18] [19] community as social reality; [20] networking; [21] the public sphere ; [22] ease and anonymity in interactions. As a result, people act in their communities according to the meanings they derive about their environment, whether online or offline, from those interactions. This perspective reveals that online communication may very well take on different meanings for different people depending on information, circumstance, relationships, power, and other systems that make up communities of practice. People enact community the way it is conceived and the meaning of community evolves as they come up with new ways to utilize it. Given this reality, scholars are continually challenged to research and understand how online communities are comprised, how they function, and how they are connected to offline social life. Laura Robinson discusses how symbolic interaction theory explains the way individuals create a sense of self through their interactions with others. However, she believes advances in technology have changed this. The article investigates the manner in which individuals form their online identity. She uses symbolic interaction theory to examine the formation of the cyber "I" and a digital "generalized other". In the article, Robinson suggests individuals form new identities on the internet. She argues these cyber identities are not necessarily the way the individual would be perceived offline. It is argued that the theory is not one theory, but rather, the framework for many different theories. Additionally, some theorists have a problem with symbolic interaction theory due to its lack of testability. These objections, combined with the fairly narrow focus of interactionist research on small-group interactions and other social psychological issues, have relegated the interactionist camp to a minority position among sociologists albeit a fairly substantial minority. Much of this criticism arose during the 1980s in the U.S. Perhaps the best known of these is by Alvin Gouldner. Some critics find the symbolic interactionist framework too broad and general when they are seeking specific theories. Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical framework rather than a theory [27] [28] and can be assessed on the basis of effective conceptualizations. The theoretical framework, as with any theoretical framework, is vague when it

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comes to analyzing empirical data or predicting outcomes in social life. As a framework rather than a theory, many scholars find it difficult to use. Interactionism being a framework rather than a theory makes it impossible to test interactionism in the manner that a specific theoretical claim about the relationship between specific variables in a given context allows. Unlike the symbolic interactionist framework, the many theories derived from symbolic interactionism, such as role theory and the versions of identity theory developed by Sheldon Stryker , [29] [30] and Peter Burke and colleagues, [31] [32] clearly define concepts and the relationships between them in a given context, thus allowing for the opportunity to develop and test hypotheses. Further, especially among Blumerian processual interactionists, a great number of very useful conceptualizations have been developed and applied in a very wide range of social contexts, types of populations, types of behaviors, and cultures and subcultures. Social structure[edit] Symbolic interactionism is often related and connected with social structure. When the reality of a situation is defined, the situation becomes a meaningful reality. This includes methodological criticisms, and critical sociological issues. Most people interpret things based on assignment and purpose. The interaction occurs once the meaning of something has become identified. This concept of meaning is what starts to construct the framework of social reality. By aligning social reality, Blumer suggests that language is the meaning of interaction. Communication, especially in the form of symbolic interactionism is connected with language. Language initiates all forms of communication, verbal and non-verbal. Blumer defines this source of meaning as a connection that arises out of the social interaction that people have with each other. Critical perspective[edit] According to social theorist Patricia Burbank, the concepts of synergistic and diverging properties are what shape the viewpoints of humans as social beings. These two concepts are different in a sense because of their views of human freedom and their level of focus. According to Burbank, actions are based on the effects of situations that occur during the process of social interaction.

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6: Sociology - Theoretical Perspectives on Government and Power

A theoretical perspective in which society is viewed as composed of symbols that people use to establish meaning, develop their views of the world, and communication with one another. Symbolic Interactionists examine how people use symbols (meanings) to develop and share their views of the world.

Todd Beer on November 16, Updated September 20, Cultural symbols and the meanings applied to them are not fixed in time. Within sociology, there is no single agreed upon definition of culture and its processes, but most definitions include a reference to culture being dynamic – that is not static. In my Introduction to Sociology class, I have settled on the following definition for students: Culture is dynamic, shared patterns of socially transmitted, norms, values, beliefs, and symbols. I usually then spend time digging deeply into each of the elements that make up that definition answering such questions as: What is the difference between a value and a belief? Symbols are physical manifestations or concepts that communicate meaning. This can be a physical object like religious symbols a cross, the Star of David, the crescent and star, etc. These items only have meaning in society because a good portion of us agree on the meaning. Cultural symbols can also be gestures. Think of a handshake versus a hug and the meaning behind each. There are other gestures with your hand that certainly have distinct meanings depending on your culture. See a guide to the different meaning of hand gestures around the world click on the image below for more. Change the cultural context and you change the meaning. Flags are also cultural symbols; important ones! A flag, any flag, is just a pattern of colors and shapes. Sometimes it is fabric, other times it is just printed on a piece of paper and taped to the window, or it is the tiniest of lapel pins – and if you are a presidential candidate you better be wearing one or you are not patriotic enough. Either way, that collection of colors and shapes has tremendous cultural meaning! In a more recent case, students at Valdosta State University used the flag on the ground as part of a protest and gathered national attention. Donal Trump tweeted about the power of this cultural symbol as well. Symbols change as the cultural context changes. This can be by moving the symbol to a different culture through global media or travel or through changes in time within the same culture. Additionally, the meaning behind the symbols is not always agreed upon within a culture. A case of the contested meaning of cultural symbols is evident in the debate over the Confederate flag in the summer of 2015. Again, this collection of colors and shapes, all shared with the US flag white stars on a blue background, red, white and blue colors, stripes, only has value because of the meaning that our culture gives it. Is it a sign of historic Southern culture or of the violently enforced system of slavery that legally defined black people and their labor as the property of white owners? Those are two dramatically different interpretations of the same symbol and depending on the meaning you place on that symbol it would alter your reaction to it. Do you put a sticker of it on your truck bumper or avoid people who display it? This topic is likely to generate some heightened emotions in the classroom and depending on where in the country you teach some serious debate, so you may want to preface the class with some ground rules. I like it as an example for this very reason. It is a symbol that most have very strong feelings about and most are aware that there are also others that feel the opposite. Here we have a symbol that generates passionate interpretations, none of which are inherent in the assemblage of colors and shapes, but are fully sociological and cultural. We can argue over facts about the flag and the Civil War that it is intimately tied to, but this example shows that cultural meaning overpowers much of that. It is likely that no historical fact will alter their view. Here are some memes from the internet promoting the symbol as one of heritage: It means a lot of people fought and died. Hines said, and not slavery. In a July poll by CNN, a majority of Americans agreed that the flag stood for Southern pride while only a third recognize it as a symbol of racism. Eighty years or so after the end of the Civil War the flag became associated with SC Senator and occasional presidential candidate, Strom Thurmond, and the Dixiecrats policies that wanted to maintain racial segregation. But just as in South Carolina in 2015, even Republicans are now mobilizing for change in Mississippi. Read more about that here. Kayne West and some other powerful hip hop artists have tried to reappropriate the

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flag by wearing it on their clothing. The Confederate flag represented slavery in a way. Now what are you going to do? It was clearly a racially motivated mass shooting. Photographs of the shooter emerged online showing him holding a Confederate flag. It was quickly solidified as a symbol of racial hatred. That same summer, Walmart, Amazon and eBay announced they would stop selling merchandise with the flag on it. The feelings about the meaning of this cultural symbol are strong; one man bombed a Walmart in Mississippi in protest. In the months following the shooting and the renewed call to bring the flag down there were nearly protests around the country in support of the Confederate flag. The flag was always on display and could not be lowered like a typical flag. She was immediately seen as a hero by many and the internet generated memes such as the one below celebrating her actions. In the fall of , the University of Mississippi decided to remove the state flag from campus because it contained the Confederate flag. We want the state to create a flag that unites us rather than divides us. Teach well, it matters. Data show that knowledge of Southern Heritage is weak among those that support the Confederate flag. Read the full story here: More recently, with the campaign and election of Donald Trump to the US presidency, the symbolism of the flag seems to be making a resurgence. Other resources click on the images below to be taken to the full content:

7: SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY READING LIST

Sociological Paradigm #3: Symbolic Interactionist Theory Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theory that focuses on the relationships among individuals within a society. Communicationâ€”the exchange of meaning through language and symbolsâ€”is believed to be the way in which people make sense of their social worlds.

8: Studies in Sociology: Symbols, Theory and Society

The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power. The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland. Jan Kubik "Jan Kubik brings a sophisticated anthropological and cultural-studies perspective to this important study of Poland in the waning years of communist rule.

9: Symbolic interactionism - Wikipedia

abstract human creations, such as language, ideas, beliefs, rules, skills, family patterns, work practices, and political and economic system. Society - group of mutually interdependent people who have organized in such a way as to share a common culture and feeling of unity.

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