

Symbolic Interactionism

Rha'Neisha Holman

Longwood University

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Dr. JoEllen Pederson

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Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory that develops from communication and interactions with people. This theory is based on social behaviors and interactions between people on an everyday basis. The symbols that people interpret from others can give them different meanings, including body language and gestures. G.H. Mead was the head leader behind symbolic interactionism, he came up with the concept of “the self.” Mead's account of the social emergence of the self is developed further through an elucidation of three forms of intersubjective activity: language, play, and the game. These forms of "symbolic interaction" (i.e., social interactions which take place via shared symbols such as words, definitions, roles, gestures, etc.) are the major paradigms in Mead's critique of socialization and are the basic social processes that render the reflexive objectification of the self-possible (Cronk, 1973.) Any one individual has to perform many different social roles; however, these roles typically have a different audience. Social roles can be assigned status or other kinds of system positions, with consequent modification of rights and duties, but the complex of all rights and duties is based on the negotiated purpose of the role (Lopata, 2003).

Herbert Blumer was a sociology faculty/student at the University of Chicago and studied under Mead. Blumer was a pro football player while getting his Ph.D., he also helped found the UC Berkeley Sociology program in 1957. Blumer devised the term symbolic interactionism as humans act towards things, including other individuals based on the meaning they have for them. In functioning in this manner, Blumer's conceptualization provides what is arguably the principal introduction to the perspective. Yet like most seminal conceptual and theoretical points of orientation, it simultaneously illuminates and obscures by directing conceptual light on some aspects and principles of social action rather than on others (Snow, 2001). The meaning of things

arising from social interactions one has with one's fellow is defined as Socially Contextualized Meaning.

Erving Goffman was a Canadian that studied at the University of Chicago. Goffman stated that social behavior is defined as role performance, which can relate to actors. He refers to symbolic interaction as a dramaturgical approach, which means society has social roles that act out between social interactions. Individuals' social interactions are slit mirrors of how other people behave. Goffman suggests that frames are not so much constructed or negotiated de novo as individuals go from one situation or activity to another, but exist, instead, as elements of the individual's or group's enveloping culture and thus contain within them the situation relevant meanings (Snow, 2001). He mentions that this social interaction between individuals is socially scripted and not spontaneous or individual creations. What it is saying is that once we see others act a certain way, we as individuals try to match those certain roles of others this includes, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, friends, and others.

I completed an observation of watching the interactions that happened on campus for 30 minutes. I have three things of interactions that I saw with my observation of the students on campus the following are uninterested, enjoyment, and being alone. All of the following are symbolic interactions that I saw between people walking on campus, waving on campus, and listening to music. Symbolic interactionism is one of the interpretive perspectives in research and, according to Schwandt is the theory and approach for the study of individuals' social and psychological action/interaction 'in search of portraying and understanding the process of meaning-making (Jeon, 2004). In my observation, I noticed some gestures of this one girl being uninterested in a conversation that she was having with a friend her body language was stating that she was ready to go. I say she was ready to go because as her friend was talking, she was

packing things up and not making eye contact with him. This symbolizes that she is uninterested, and she is possibly ready to go.

Another observation I completed was friends enjoyed themselves by talking to each other. I saw two boys hug each other and give each other high-fives when they were splitting both ways and they both said see you later. This is another form of symbolic interactionism because they both are interacting with each other through their body language and their gestures. The last observation that I saw was everyone on campus was alone, and the majority of them did not interact with each other on campus. The people that I saw on campus were more to themselves and interacting on their phones, such as texting, on social media, on FaceTime, or listening to music. These themes are occurring on campus because that is what they have learned from other people and what I mean by that is watching other people. Most people adapt to certain ways by looking at other people and studying them. In this case, I feel that most of the symbolic interaction came from their parents because the first social interaction you have is with your parents.

In conclusion, symbolic interactionism is a concept that we go through on a day-to-day basis. If we did not have it, we would be clueless in society today because everything is changing. Mead, Blumer, and Goffman made some points about symbolic interactions, social roles, role performances, and social interventions. Symbolic interactionism is very powerful in the world that we live in today. I say that because they are different occupations and establishments that we face today. Symbolic interactionism is often represented as a perspective that is limited by its restriction to 'micro' aspects of social organization. As such, it is allegedly unable to adequately conceptualize 'macro' phenomena such as social structure, patterns of inequality, and power (Dennis and Martin, 2005).

Reference

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