

Symbolic Interactionism

Roots

- Pragmatism:

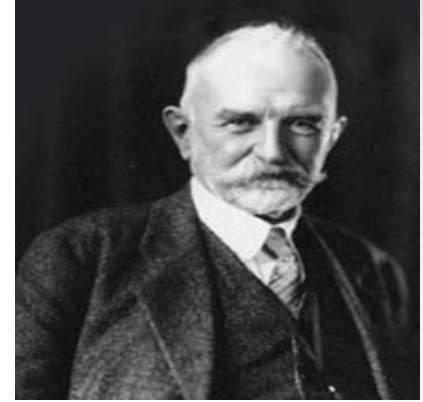
- Reality is not 'out there' → actively created
- We base our knowledge on what has proven to be useful
- Define 'objects' according to use
- Base our understanding of actors on what people actually do



- Symbolic Interactionism

1. Focus on interaction actor-world
2. View of actor & world as dynamic processes
3. Importance actor's ability to interpret the social world

Roots



- Behaviorism

- Concerned with observable behaviors → stimuli, response



- Symbolic interactionism

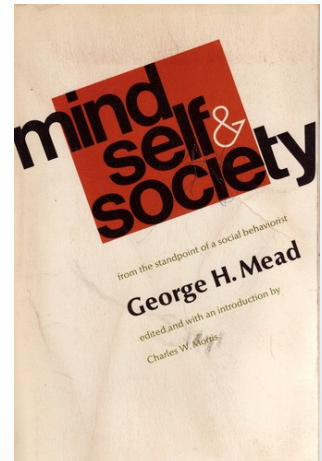
- Mead: covert aspects
- Blumer: Similar to Mead but also included other forms of psychological reductionism

George Herbert Mead

- *Mind, Self and Society*
- Priority to social world in understanding social experience
- The act: Four stages
 1. Impulse: stimulation and reaction
 2. Perception: Search for and react to stimuli that relate to the impulse
 3. Manipulation: of the object
 4. Consummation: the taking of action that satisfies the original impulse

↔ The social act

- Gestures → significant symbols
- *Mind*: process, social phenomenon

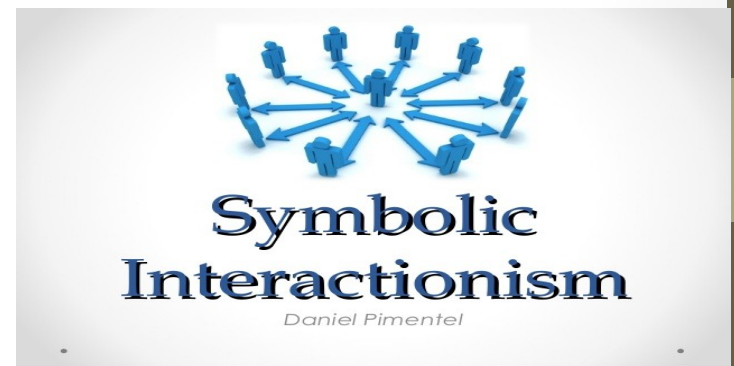


George Herbert Mead

- *Self*: To be both subject and object
 - Child development: play & game stage
 - Generalized Other
 - 'I': immediate response, unpredictable, creative, makes changes possible
 - 'Me': the adoption of the generalized other, conscious, social control
- *Society*: Social process that precedes both mind and self
 - Organized set of responses → me
 - Social institutions

Basic Principles

1. Capacity for thought
2. Shaped by social interaction
3. In interaction we learn meanings and symbols
4. Meanings and symbols allow human action and interaction
5. People can modify or alter meanings and symbols (based on interpretation of the situation)
6. People are able to make those modifications because of their ability to interact with themselves
7. Patterns of action and interaction make up groups and societies



The Self

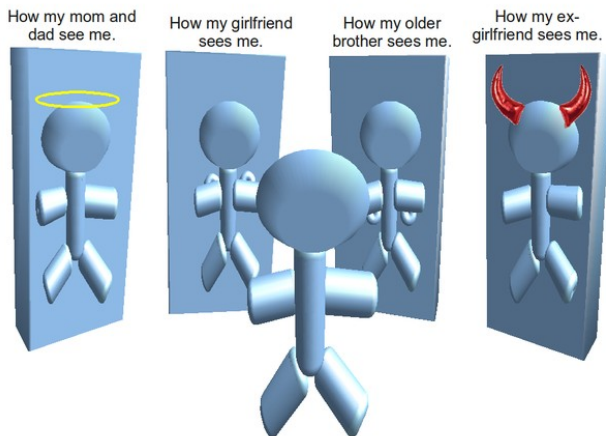
- Looking-glass self

- Blumer:

“Nothing esoteric is meant by this expression [self]. It means merely that a human being can be an object of his own action . . . he acts toward himself and guides himself in his actions toward others on the basis of the kind of object he is to himself ”

- It's a process, not a thing

The Looking Glass Self



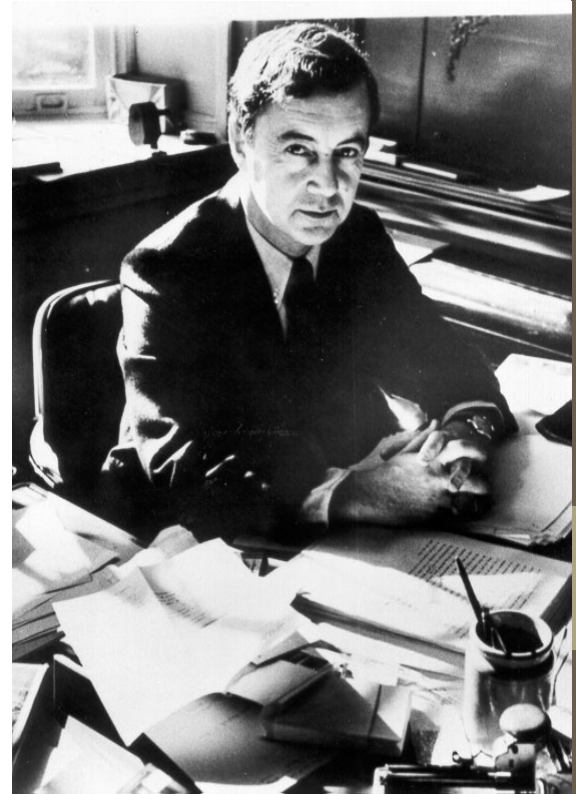
Erving Goffman

- Crucial discrepancy between our all-too-human selves and our socialized selves
- Focus on dramaturgy: social life as a series of dramatic performances
- Self as product of dramatic interaction between actor and audience
- 'Impression management'
- Front stage
- Setting
- Personal front
 - Appearance
 - Manner



Erving Goffman

- Mystification
- The team
- Back stage
- Outside
- Role distance
- Stigma: gap virtual – actual social identity
- Frame analysis: structures that invisibly govern everyday situations,
- Frames: principles of organization that define our experiences



Herbert Blumer

- Critical of 'sociological determinism'
- Essence of society to be found in actors and action
- → joint action (Mead: Social act): comes to have character of its own, but created by actors and their actions
- People do not really act within the context of structures such as society, rather they act in situations.
- 3 Premises:
 1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the *meaning* that things have for them
 2. The meaning of such things is derived from/arises out of social interaction (*the source of meaning*)
 3. These meanings are handled in/modified through an interpretative process used by a person (*Interpretation*)

Questions

- Do you think Goffman is right with his impression management? Are we really stigmatized? If yes, how?