
Interactionism: “ the individual is not only influenced by his/her environment, but that s/he also influences his/her environment. The emphasis is on the person taking an active, or constructive, part in his/her development.”

(http://www.psybox.com/web_dictionary/Interactionism.htm.)

“Human behavior is interpreted as a response to the symbolic act of others.”

(www.dhep.astate.edu/role/roletwotwoperspectives.htm)

Interactionism

1. Emphasizes individuals
 2. Focus on subjective aspects of social life
 3. Studies communication between individuals and groups
 4. Communicates with symbols which are meaningful
 5. Deviance and individual differences are more tolerated
-

Leaders in Interactionism

- Max Weber (1864-1920)
 - George Herbert Mead (1863-1931)
 - Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929)
 - Herbert Blumer (1900-1987)
 - Manford Kuhn (d.1963)
 - Irving (Erving) Goffman (1922-1982)
-

George Herbert Mead

- communication as essential to the social order
- “I” = self-conception
- “Me” = views of others
- Self = I + Me
- Role taking
- Students published his works post-humously in *Mind, Self and Society*



(1863-1931)

Father of Symbolic Interactionism
Chicago School

George Herbert Mead

- “I” = impulsive, creative, spontaneous, generally not influenced by social constraints.
 - “Me” = reflective, socially aware, analytical, and evaluative, reflects on the impulses and actions of the “I.”
-

Symbolic Interaction

Charles Horton Cooley

Chicago School

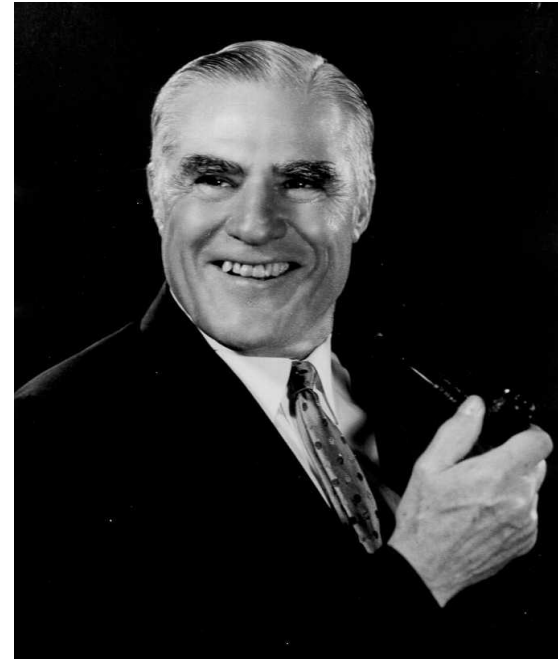
- ❑ “primary group”
- ❑ “looking glass self.”
- ❑ Imagine how we appear to others



(1864-1929)


Herbert Blumer

- Coined the term **“symbolic interaction”**
- Student of Mead
- Chicago School
- **Stimulus -> Interpretation
-> Response**
- ***Movies and Conduct***
(1933)



(1900-1987)

Herbert Blumer

- 
- 1: Humans act toward others on the basis of meanings those individuals have for them.
 - 2: Meaning is created in interaction between people.
 - 3: Meanings are modified through an interpretive process.
-

Manford Kuhn

- Iowa School
 - Symbolic Interactionism to generate and interpret
 - qualitative data
 - statistical data
 - Who Am I –TST- 1954
-

Irving Goffman

- *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*
- “The Shakespeare of Interactionism”
- Dramaturgy
- Front stage
- Back stage



(1863-1982)

Meaning

Construction of Social Reality

Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings those things have for them.

Language and Meaning

Meaning arises out of the interaction of the individual with others.



Interpretive Process

An interpretive process is used by the person in each instance in which he must deal with things in his environment.

Baby becomes a “self” by interaction



Interactionists see humans as active, creative participants who construct their social world and not as passive, conforming objects of socialization.

Healthy Personality

- Baby progresses from self-involvement, to pretend play, to symbols.
 - We have many selves/roles
 - The ability to adjust between “selves” keeps us mentally healthy
-

Deviance transmitted through socialization

- Primary deviance
 - isolated acts by a person
- Secondary deviance
 - deviance as a lifestyle and a personal identity

Characteristics of Healthy Personality

- Desired patterns of interaction flourish
 - Understanding of others
 - Retains individuality
 - Maximum participation in society
 - Self-realization is attained through the consummation of a distinct set of impulses
 - what brings fulfillment to one person may be different than what brings fulfillment to another
-

Characteristics of an Unhealthy Personality

- Communicates in guarded, defensive, and sometimes bizarre ways
 - Misinterprets of symbols of others
 - misunderstands what someone says
 - misinterprets actions (shove vs. bump)
 - Self-imposes isolation
 - Becomes extremely frustrated with the selves
 - Rejects accepted norms - antisocial
-

Characteristics of an Unhealthy Personality

- Lacks a “conscience”
 - Cannot comprehend the social consequences of their actions
 - Acts in a way that doesn’t conform to underlying private attitudes and preoccupations. In lay terms this is called “putting on a false front”
 - Exhibits schizophrenic actions
 - Exhibits anxious actions
-

Guidelines for Assessing Interaction of Groups

- Researcher must immerse himself in the group
- Focus on face-to-face interactions
- Role playing

Methods

- Observation
 - Sampling over time and situations
 - Interviews
-

Examples of Societal Interventions

- Parenting classes
 - Prevention programs such as Head Start
 - Early identification programs for children at risk.
-

Assets of Interactionism



- Very encompassing
 - Theory in process
 - great influence on later humanistic/interpretive theories
 - Allows direct input from person(s) involved
 - Importance of Labels
 - Importance of Role, Role stress, Role loss
-

Limitations of Interactionism

- Theory is vague
 - hard to summarize
 - Lacks clarity
 - Differing interpretations
 - different people have attached different meanings to the theory
 - Some theorists overstate their case
 - as when Mead differentiates humans from other animals
 - Assessment may be unreliable
 - subjective measures
-

Implications for Communication

- Symbols / language in knowledge acquisition
 - Self, Self Concept
 - Role
 - Interaction
 - Social creation of reality
-