Socialization &
the Life Cycle

Social Interaction & Everyday Life

Socialization

- Process of social interaction by which people acquire the knowledge, attitudes, values, and behaviors essential for effective participation in society
  - Learned through interaction
    - Children learn the ways of the elders
  - We are not born with a set of attitudes or values
    - Acquired through life and experiences

Nurture vs. Nature (1)

- Environment vs. Heredity
- Most people recognize that we are a combination
  - Heredity and environmental factors interact with and affect one another
- Danger in attributing social behavior solely to heredity factors
  - Some use them to justify low social status in others
    - Example: the enslavement of blacks
Nurture vs. Nature (2)

- John B. Watson (1878-1958)
  - Held that behavior is not instinctive but learned
    - People are equally human, just culturally different
    - Human behavior is rooted in nurture not nature
  - Social scientists are cautious about describing any human behavior as instinctive
    - Human life depends on the functioning of the body
    - Whether you develop your inherited potential depends on how you are raised
  - Nurture matters more in shaping human behavior
    - *Nurture is our nature*

Sociobiology (1)

- Systematic study of the biological bases of social behavior
- Application of biological principles to explain the social activities of animals, including human beings
  - Social darwinism
- Our genes influence our physical traits as well as our behavior (genetically programmed)
  - Example: women are not driven to have sexual relations because their overriding interests in caring for children
  - Men are more promiscuous to maximize impregnation

Sociobiology (2)

- *Criticism:*
  - Franz Boas argued that culture, not biology, is what makes people what they are and explains differences between groups
Micro Level Theoretical Perspectives

- **Social Learning Theory**
  - We are socialized through positive and negative reinforcement by parents, friends, and society.
  - We observe and imitate socialized behavior.

- **Cognitive Developmental Theory (Piaget)**
  - Socialization occurs in step with cognitive development.
    - Sensorimotor (learning through senses)
    - Preoperational (learning of symbols and language)
    - Concrete operational (learning is more abstract such as arithmetic)
    - Formal operations stages (logical abilities)

George Herbert Mead (1)

- Socialization takes place through symbols and interpretation of meanings.
  - Actions through which people observe, interpret, evaluate and communicate.
  - Critical in the development of the self.
    - You learn who you are.
    - “taking the role of the other” to learn what it means to be in the shoes of somebody else.
  - “I”: unsocialized infant.
  - “me”: social self or development of a social consciousness by coming to see themselves as others see them.
  - Generalized other: children learn the values and morals around them.

George Herbert Mead (2)

- At first, children learn to use language and other symbols by imitating important people (significant others) in their lives, such as their mother and father.
- Second, children pretend to be other people. They use their imaginations to role play in games such as “house,” “school,” and “doctor.”
- Third, around the age of 7, children learn to play complex games that require them to simultaneously take the role of several other people. In baseball, for example, the infielders have to be aware of the expectations of everyone in the infield.
- Once a child can think in this complex way, she can begin the fourth stage in the development of the self, which involves taking the role of what Mead called the generalized other.
- A person’s image of these cultural standards and how they are applied to her is what Mead meant by the generalized other.
George Herbert Mead (3)

- The self develops only with social experience
  - Rejected the idea that personality is guided by biology (Freud) or biological maturation (Piaget)
  - Self develops only as individual interacts with others
  - Without interaction, body grows, but no self emerges

- Social experience is the exchange of symbols
  - Humans find meaning in action by imagining people’s underlying intentions

Charles Horton Cooley (1)

- **Looking-glass self theory**
  - We learn who we are by interacting with others
  - Our view of ourselves comes not only from our contemplation of our qualities, but from our impressions of how others see us

- **Example**: When teachers evaluate students negatively, for example, students may develop a negative self-concept that causes them to do poorly in school. Poor performance may have as much to do with teachers’ negative evaluations as with students’ innate abilities

Charles Horton Cooley (2)

- **Looking-glass self theory**: Three stages:
  - We imagine how we present ourselves to others
  - We imagine how others evaluate us
  - We develop feelings about ourselves, based on those impressions

  - BUT, since this comes from an “imagination” of what others are thinking about us, we can develop a self-identity base on incorrect perceptions of how others see us
  - Might also change quite frequently
  - “I am who I think you think I am”
By influencing other people’s ideas of us we can hope to predict or control what happens to us.

Impression management
- We have a stake in presenting ourselves to others in ways that will lead them to view us in a favorable light
- You learn to adapt the presentation of the self in order to create distinctive appearances and satisfy particular audiences

Dramaturgical approach
- The world is a stage
  - Front stage (or regions)
    - You are not alone, so you perform
  - Back stage (or regions)
    - You are alone, preparing to perform

Face work
- “Saving face” when embarrassed or when presentation is rejected
  - We need to maintain a proper image of the self for interaction to continue

Why are social roles “performed” and not simply “filled”?
- Every situation is new
- We have to improvise; there is no script that can apply to all situations
- We can choose to perform roles in different ways

Performance reveals conscious and unconscious information about us
- Includes
  - Dress (costume)
  - Objects we carry (props)
  - Tone of voice and way we carry ourselves (demeanor)
  - Vary performances according to where we are (the set)
Erving Goffman (4)

- We construct performances to idealize our intentions
  - We try to convince others (and perhaps ourselves) that our actions reflect ideal cultural standards rather than selfish motives
- Rarely do people admit the more common less honorable motives
- We all use idealization to some degree

Gender and Performance (1)

- Women are more sensitive to nonverbal communication than men
  - Central element in personal performances

  **Demeanor**
  - *The way we act and carry ourselves*
    - Clue to social power
    - Because women generally occupy positions of less power, demeanor is also a gender issue

Gender and Performance (2)

- Use of space
  - Personal space
    - *The surrounding area over which a person makes some claim to privacy*
    - Everywhere, men, because of their greater social power, often intrude into women’s personal space
    - Woman moving into a man’s personal space can be taken as a sign of sexual interest
Social Interaction

- Our daily interactions with others give structure to what we do
  - We learn about ourselves

- The study of everyday life reveals how human construct their own reality
  - Social construction of race, gender etc…

- Studying individual social interactions shed light on the larger social systems and institutions

The Social Construction of Reality (1)

- “Inevitably we construct ourselves. Let me explain. I enter this house and immediately I become what I have to become, what I can become: I construct myself. That is, I present myself to you in a form suitable to the relationship I wish to achieve with you. And, of course, you do the same with me.”

The Social Construction of Reality (2)

- The process by which people creatively shape reality through social interaction
  - Idea is the foundation of the symbolic-interaction approach
  - “Reality” remains unclear in everyone’s minds
    - Especially in unfamiliar situations
  - Social interaction is a complex negotiation that builds reality
  - Perception of events are based on different interests and intentions
Linking Micro with Macrosociology (1)

- Our day-to-day social interactions and larger social patterns are interconnected
- Women and men in public
  - Harassment of women might represent an individual case but it actually reflect the values of the larger society
    - Gender inequality
    - Male privilege
    - Objectification of women’s bodies
  - Different types of language (street talk) for men and women

Linking Micro with Macrosociology (2)

- Elijah Anderson’s *Streetwise & Code of the Street*
- His research present simple day-to-day interactions between blacks and whites, and among people living poor urban areas
- Interactions were found to be based on outside statuses such as race, class and gender
  - You have to understand individual interactions based on the larger context
  - Those statuses will impact the types of relationships one has with others, and will develop different meanings and symbols for different members of society
    - Decent families vs. street families
    - Decent families also have to learn the code of the street (outside statuses)

Agents of Socialization

- Groups of social contexts in which significant process of socialization occur
  - Family
  - Peer relationships
  - Schools
  - Mass Media
  - Workplace
  - The State
  - Religion
  - Travels
Types of Socialization

- **Primary socialization:**
  - The process of acquiring the basic skills needed to function in society during childhood. Primary socialization usually takes place in a family.

- **Secondary socialization:**
  - Socialization outside the family after childhood.

Family

- The family is well suited to providing the kind of careful, intimate attention required for primary socialization.
  - Family also gives children a social identity.
- The family is a small group. Its members are in frequent face-to-face contact.
- Most parents love their children and are therefore highly motivated to care for them.
  - These characteristics make most families ideal for teaching small children everything from language to their place in the world.
  - Enrichment activities represent *cultural capital*.
  - Advances children’s learning.

Schools

- For children older than 5, the child-care problem was resolved partly by the growth of the public school system, which was increasingly responsible for secondary socialization.
- Instructing students in academic and vocational subjects is just one part of the school’s job.
- *Hidden curriculum*:
  - Instruction in what will be expected of students as conventionally good citizens once they leave school.
**What is the content of the hidden curriculum? (1)**

- In the family, children tend to be evaluated on the basis of personal and emotional criteria.
  - Students are led to believe that they are evaluated solely on the basis of their performance on impersonal, standardized tests. They are told that similar criteria will be used to evaluate them in the world of work. The lesson is only partly true.
- Not just performance but also class, gender, and racial criteria help determine success in school and in the work world.
- The important point is that the hidden curriculum has done its job if it convinces students that they are judged on the basis of performance alone.
  - A successful hidden curriculum also teaches students punctuality, respect for authority, the importance of competition in leading to excellent performance, and other conformist behaviors and beliefs that are expected of good citizens, conventionally defined.

**What is the content of the hidden curriculum? (2)**

- Why do some poor and racial-minority students reject the hidden curriculum?
  - Because their experience and the experience of their friends and family members may make them skeptical about the ability of school to open job opportunities for them.
  - As a result, they rebel against the authority of the school.
- Believing that education does not lead to economic success can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
  - The expectation that helps cause the situation it predicts.
  - Internalizing images and eventually behaving the way you were labeled as.
    - Example: Images of African American males have historically been negative.
    - Many have internalized them and behave along those negative stereotypes.

**Definition of the Situation**

- Interpretation or meaning we give to our immediate circumstances.
  - We make sense of a certain situation.
  - "If we define situations as real, then they are real in their consequences" (WI Thomas).
    - Example: believing that school won’t help you get ahead may cause you to perform poorly in school, and you are more likely to end up in the lower social class.
- Danger of using stereotypes to define situation.
  - We rely on images, which are socially produced by society and might not represent reality.
  - Example: students singled out by teachers as high achievers tend to score significantly higher than those singled out as low achievers.
Identity

- It relates to the understandings people hold about who they are and what is meaningful to them

Sources of identity
- Gender, sexual orientation, race, social class etc…

Social identity
- It refers to the characteristics that other people attribute to the individual such as mother, student, professor

Self-identity (or personal identity)
- It refers to the self-development through which we formulate a unique sense of ourselves and our relationship to the social environment around us