

Symbolic Interaction Report

In terms of sociology, symbolic interaction is a perspective which seeks to understand how people interact with their peers, their family, social structures and even institutions around them. Social scientists such as Mead, Cooley, Goffman, Thomas and Merton have all examined this paradigm and discussed various aspects of how symbols become important for us as social animals. Even the idea of the self can be symbol as it is created through interaction with others and communication with other individuals. A symbol can also change meaning over time even if the object or person associated with the symbol does not change. However, symbolic interaction becomes more realistic when humans are able to interpret the actions of others by applying a meaning to the actions.

George Herbert Mead discusses the notion of significant other (pg. 127) and the generalized other (pg. 128) as examples of symbols with which we interact. The individual self comes out of the experiences a person has had as a result of symbolic interactions and gestures presented by society. However, more central to his argument is the idea of the I and the me which are slightly different aspects of the self. The me is a production of the environment in which the person lives. It is created when the person acquires knowledge about society and the ways in which s/he relates to it. Things such as gender, age, socioeconomic position all become parts of the me and this created by how other individual respond to him/her. The I on the other hand, is the active persona of the individual which works within the parameters set by the me to interact with society.

As a part of the formation of the self, the ideas of Cooley have to be considered important since his position on the looking glass self (pg. 129) is quite useful in many cases. According to Cooley, the looking glass self is created when a person judges him/herself unconsciously or consciously to be a certain way in terms of traits and personality. Then the person observes and views the reactions of others to understand how much of their own concept is true which in turn creates as well as evaluates a personal concept of the self.

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