

### Part 3: Symbolic Interactionism and the Feminist Perspective

- Macro and Micro level Theory
  - Despite their major differences, functionalist and conflict/power theory have one thing in common:
    - Both are aimed @ Macro-level understandings of the social world
      - Institution social classes
    - Social like takes place at the micro level too.
    - Symbolic interactionism is a perspective that is geared toward Micro-level understandings
- Symbolic interactionism
  - George H. Mead
  - SI is a product of North American Sociology
  - Proceeds from premise that humans are unique in attaching meanings to things. Humans use symbols.
- Core assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism
  - Human beings act on things based on the meanings they've attached to them.
  - Meanings are created/ emerge from social interaction with others and society
  - We use our own thought process develop our own interpretation of symbols.
  - The process of role taking shapes ones understanding of others and their self.
- Interaction shapes identity
  - Mead; development of the self in children
    - Child first identifies individuals
      - Mom, dad, Gma
  - Various persons form the childs sense of the generalized other
  - The "me" = organized attitudes (expectations) of others including into the self.
  - The "I" responses of the person to the organized attitudes of others.
  - Sense of self comes about through our interaction with society and our interpretations of society expectations of us.
- Reality is subjective and socially constructed
  - Interactionists focus on subjective suspects of social life (People act according to their subjective perceptions of reality)
  - Humans= pragmatic actors, continually adjust their behavior to the actions of actors.
  - We adjust to these actions only because we are able to interpret them.
  - The process of adjustment is aided by our ability to imaginatively rehearse alternative lives of action before we act
  - The process is aided by our actions and even ourselves as symbolic objects.

- o Interactionists see humans as active, creative participants who construct their social world, not as passive conforming objects of socialization (human agency)
- Objective reality vs. Subjective interpretations
  - o Pregnancy is an objective, biological reality
  - o Womens interpretation of this objective reality is subjective. Different women might attach a different meaning to be pregnant
  - o How a woman responds to this objective reality depends on the subjective meaning she has attached to this pregnancy.
- Symbolic interactionism and research
  - o Research by interactionists focuses on easily observable face to face interactions of individuals rather than on macro-level structural relationships involving social institutions.
  - o They tend to study social interaction through participant observation, rather than surveys and other quantitative methods.
  - o Close contact and immersion in the everyday lives of the participants is seen as necessary for understanding the meaning of actions, the definition of the situations itself and the process by which actors construct the situation through their interaction.
- Criticism of symbolic interactionism
  - o Often overly impressionistic in their research method (some reject traditional scientific method, which focuses on objective reality)
  - o Narrow focus on small-group interactions and social psych
  - o Inability of many symbolic interactionists to account for the impact of social structure on peoples lives.