

Cheshire Notes (Aug 31)

Symbolic Interaction Terms (Goffman reading)

Symbolic Interactionism:

George Mead (1863-1931)

- built SI upon principles of pragmatism (practical consequences) and psychological behaviorism (explaining behavior in terms of external stimuli)
 - interaction is key
 - actors AND social world are dynamic processes
 - interpretation is key to understanding social world

Herbert Blumer

- Student of Mead's; developed 3 core principles to SI
 - Meaning (action is derived from meaning)
 - Language (mechanism of conveying meaning)
 - Thought (interpretation)

Key Ideas from Symbolic Interactionism:

- 1) human thought is shaped by social interaction
- 2) people learn meaning and symbols through social interaction
- 3) people modify the meanings and symbols in interactions by interpreting situations they are engaged in.

Symbols

“Building blocks of meaning”

Self-Concept

- A product of social interaction processes; we do not merely ‘create’ who we are.

Goffman's Key Terms:

Front

“Part of individual performance which regularly functions in a fixed fashion”

Definition of the Situation

“A shared definition of a social event, accomplished through symbolic interaction”

Idealization

“filling in gaps of knowledge about others with ideal types”

Expressions Given/Given Off

Given—our intentional ‘performance’ in a role, in our interactions with others.

Given off—often includes nonverbal communication, body language, demeanor, use of space, etc.

Impression Management

All of the processes and efforts that individuals go through to maintain a performance

CMC class notes — 31 Aug 2006 — Fiore

▼ J. Donath: "Identity and Deception in the Virtual Community"

▼ Studying newsgroups

- Several of our readings this semester examine newsgroups

▼ Newsgroup use generally seems to be declining

- Web-based bulletin boards supplant them — but these are often walled gardens from which researchers can't get data

▼ So why study them?

▼ Newsgroup messages are, for the most part, openly distributed among a network of NNTP servers, which makes them easy to capture

- Netscan architecture, NNDB at Media Lab — collectors acting as news servers
- Newsgroups are a good example of a threaded, persistent, asynchronous messaging system, which is what most of the Web bulletin boards and special-purpose groupware supports, too.
- Tremendous shift in the nature of the medium when archives like DejaNews became available

▼ Signaling

- Some easier (cheaper) to produce — "conventional" signals
- Some harder (more expensive, inherently reliable) — "assessment" signals

▼ In animals

- Big horns on a stag — biologically expensive to maintain, unimpeachable

▼ In humans

- Wealth — fancy car
- Youth, fertility — very hard to fake
- Graduating from Harvard — hard, expensive (in terms of effort, intelligence, time, money)
- Wearing a Harvard T-shirt — easy, cheap (in all the same senses)

▼ Assessing signals

▼ What is the "cost of probing"?

- Perhaps higher for assessment signals (extensive job interview vs. just reading a resume)

▼ Persistent identity and reputation

- How easy is it to change identities? (very)

▼ How easy is it to build a reputation with a new identity (hard)

- Incentive to behave properly — form of positive reputation
- Negative reputation not so important here because people can change identities easily

▼ Pseudonymity vs. anonymity

- Difference: persistence of identity — accretion of reputation
- ▼ "Given" vs. "given off" online
 - ▼ Given
 - Email address
 - Signature
 - Age, sexual orientation, etc.
 - Certain conventional signals ("I am smart")
 - ▼ Given off
 - Voice, vocabulary
 - See Herring & Martinson next week on gender authenticity
 - ▼ What about in other media?
 - IM — idle time, response speed
 - Typos
 - What's behind you in the scene during video chat
 - Certain assessment signals (being able to write cogently)
- Trolling
- Category deception
- Impersonation
- Identity concealment
- Tension between playful use of a social environment vs. "literal" use (for lack of a better term)
- ▼ What are examples of assessment signals online?
 - *alt.hackers* example — have to have the prowess to hack the news moderation system in order to post
 - What are examples of conventional signals?
 - "The architects of a virtual space - from the software designers to the site administrators - shape the community in a more profound way than do their real-world counterpart. People eat, sleep, and work in buildings; the buildings affect how happily they do these things. But the buildings do not completely control their perception of the world. In the electronic domain, the design of the environment is everything."