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SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

WINTER TERM 2024



What is symbolic interactionism?

What is Thomas and Thomas theorem?

What are the main assumptions of Goffman's theory?

What are feeling rules?

what happened to sociology at the turn of the XXth century?

- Sociology „moved“ to USA...
- USA – a brand new society:
 - Migrants from all over the world – melting pot society
 - New, modern cities – Chicago, New York
 - Taylorism – rationally managed capitalism
- New way of thinking in philosophy and social sciences: PRAGMATISIM (very much rooted in the American social order, theory to be put in practice)

pragmatisim

- William James, John Dewey
- social psychology as a separate discipline – interest in development of the child; identity and self
- a philosophy strictly connected to the mindset of the USA
- practicality of the theory as a main criterium; to be applied in the society and solve its problems

Charles Cooley (1864-1929)

GROUPS:

1. Primary – those we are obliged to belong to
2. Secondary – those we choose ourselves as adults



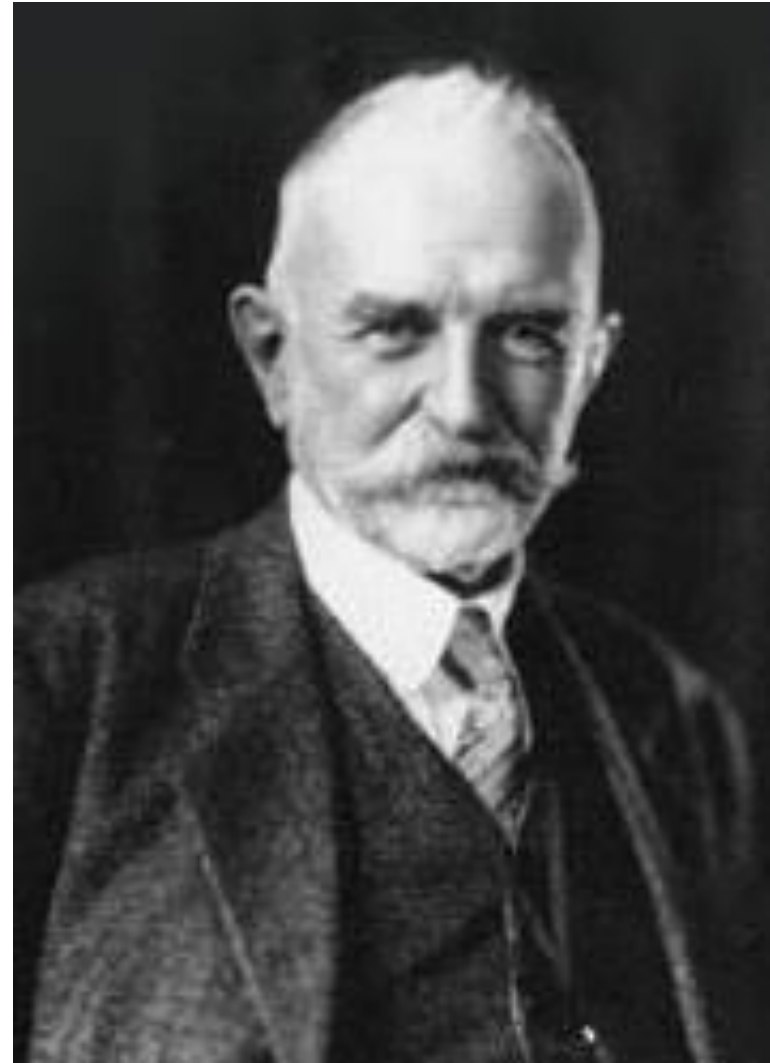
“The imaginations people have of one another are the solid facts of society”
(Cooley, 1902)

George Herbert Mead (1863-1931)

He was not a sociologist

Mind, Self and Society, 1934

- Priority given to the social world in understanding the social experience.
- The social world precedes the individual mind both logically and temporally.



Mind, Self and Society

MIND – a process, not a thing; an inner conversation with one's self; a social phenomenon

SELF – the ability to take oneself as an object; it presupposes a social process: communication among humans; the self is made through social activity and relationships; there is a development of self

STAGES OF SELF DEVELOPMENT:

1. PLAY – children learn to take roles of discrete others
2. GAME – children learn to take; roles of everyone in the game; rules

GENERALISED OTHER – the attitude of the entire community; the ability to take the role of the generalised other



SOCIETY – the ongoing social process that precedes both the mind and the self.



education as the essential process in the society – common habits of the community are internalised in the actor

Mind, Self and Society

Thomas & Thomas theorem

- DEFINITION OF THE SITUATION

- „If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”
- William Issac Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas

symbolic interactionism

- the term coined by Herbert Blumer in 1937

MAIN ASSUMPTIONS OF THE PARADIGM:

1. Humans have the capacity to think
2. The capacity to thought is shaped by social interaction
3. In interactions people learn the meanings and symbols that they use in action and interaction
4. The intertwined patterns of action and interactions make up groups and societies.



Erving Goffman (1922-1982)

- Canadian born
- from the migrant Jewish family from the Eastern Europe

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life

self

- all-too-human selves vs. socialized selves (after Mead)

What people expect from us and what we can / want do spontaneously?

- the product of the dramatic interaction between an actor and an audience



role

An expected behaviour in a given society, situation or social context.

An inter-role conflict and intra-role conflict?

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impression managment

TECHNIQUES actors use to maintain certain impressions in the face of problems they are likely to encounter, and methods they use to cope with theses problems.



after Goffman

- ethnomethodology
- sociolinguistics
- studies in microsociology – Randall Collins
- Arlie Russell Hochschild

Arlie Russell
Hochschild

(1940-)



Feeling rules

- Shared, social (collectivist) conventions that determine what we should properly feel in a given situation (the "direction of emotions"), how intensely we should feel (the "extent"), and how long we should feel it (the "duration").

Hochschild 2003:97

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPmv945Fw7w&ab_channel=CentralEuropeanUniversity