

although obviously access to a networked computer is required. Thus, online surveys may be practical for certain populations but not so for others; that is, those without digital access. Analysis of data gathered from an online survey may be greatly facilitated by moving electronic responses directly into analysis software.

Survey Sampling

Regardless of the specific survey method used, sampling (i.e., identifying potential respondents) is critical. A census refers to sampling an entire population or universe; that is, all members of a particular group, regardless of the size of the group. Populations do not have to be people, but may be organizations or pieces of text. The most important thing about samples is the degree to which they are representative; a sample must reflect the population that it purports to stand for. A random sample is a probability sample, where each case has an equal chance of being selected. Random samples are used when the intention is to seek external validity. A stratified sample is based on studying a certain attribute in a population. For example, individuals are categorized as to whether or not they possess that attribute, which may be based on gender, ethnicity, educational level, and so on. Proportional sampling is based on the proportion or percentage each group contributes to the entire population (e.g., to look at a group of people in relation to the proportion of their representation in a population). Cluster sampling usually refers to selection on the basis of geography; in this case, the sample is usually then structured in other ways, such as stratified, or random, or both. Nonprobability sampling, which is typical for qualitative research, includes convenience sampling (e.g., approach the first x number of people who appear in the grocery store). A quota sample is used when the researcher wants to be sure that the sample includes individuals with a number of characteristics. A sequential sampling approach involves choosing every n th item in a group.

Trustworthiness

Validity and reliability are important aspects of survey research. Internal validity is achieved when the survey's questions and answers accurately measure or reflect what the investigators want to know and are not distorted by some other factor. External validity refers to how representative a sample of the population is. In survey research, it is important to factor in the return

rate as well as the proportion of nonrespondents to know if there is a statistically significant difference between respondents and nonrespondents with regard to certain characteristics. Reliability refers to the consistency of data gathering in measuring whatever the survey purports to measure. To ensure reliability, the researcher looks at question wording to ask whether the questions really ask for the information in the best possible way or to ask if people from different groups understand the questions in the same way. Reliability can be improved by asking the same question twice on a questionnaire or by following up to check on similarity of response in an interview. Trustworthiness is equally important when using methods such as observation; for example, recording observations in multiple ways (e.g., using photography as well as individuals' visual observations) and using more than one observer are ways to increase trustworthiness.

Survey research is common because it is so flexible, open to researchers taking quantitative as well as qualitative approaches. Survey methods can answer a wide range of research questions, from the "who" and "what" to the "how" and "why." Because of this flexibility, survey research is appealing to inexperienced researchers and is, therefore, open to careless design and data collection practices. However, trustworthy survey research requires careful consideration of design and research conduct.

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See also Content Analysis; Empirical Research; Reliability; Sampling; Validity

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SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Symbolic interactionism (SI) is a sociological and social-psychological perspective grounded in the

study of the meanings that people learn and assign to the objects and actions that surround their everyday experiences. It is a theoretical perspective that was originally developed in the early half of the 20th century by scholars at the University of Chicago. SI is the most sociological of a range of social psychology traditions (others include cognitive sociology, discursive psychology, ethnomethodology, and rational choice-exchange theory) and was originally conceptualized by the philosopher George Herbert Mead, although he never used the term. The perspective was first given coherence by Mead's students from Chicago, who collected and, in 1934, published their notes from his social psychology courses in a book titled *Mind, Self, and Society*. In 1937, Herbert Blumer, one of Mead's students, coined the term *symbolic interactionism* and subsequently consolidated much of Mead's work into a distinct sociological perspective. Blumer's 1969 book, *Symbolic Interactionism*, is a collection of his own essays and is still widely acknowledged as a major statement on the perspective.

The term *symbolic interactionism* is comprised of two concepts: symbol and interaction. Symbol refers to any social object (e.g., a physical object, a gesture, or a word) that stands in place of or represents something else. Symbols are a uniquely human creation. No other animal has the ability to arbitrarily assign meaning; that is, make something into a social object. Interaction highlights the significance of interpersonal communication in transmitting the meaning of symbols. Through interaction, culture arises. Interactionists understand culture to be the ideas, objects, and practices that constitute everyday life. Howard Becker has noted that, on the one hand, culture preexists individuals' births and therefore, structures their lives. On the other hand, people are autonomous, interpretive beings who have the ability to negotiate, modify, or reject the meanings they learn, thus actively shaping culture. From a symbolic interactionist perspective then, human beings are active creators of symbols and culture. As one example, consider the symbolic meaning of communism. The word means very different things to different people in different places at different times. As a symbol, communism signifies an emancipatory political-economic model to some people, while to others it represents repression, collective poverty, and aggression. Each of these meanings, and many more, is learned by people through their interactions with other people, various media, and so on. Communism is not a tangible thing—it cannot be seen or touched—yet it is

a social object because it refers to a set of processes (ideological, political, economic) that occur in the world. Through symbolic interaction, human beings construct, share, resist, modify, or reject various aspects of the social world.

SI offered a radical conceptualization of sociological theory compared to the macro, structural, positivist sociology that dominated American sociology at its emergence in the 1930s. Rather than rely on quantitatively derived data that were collected through representative survey research and analyzed using statistics, symbolic interactionists primarily collect and analyze qualitative data from people's experiences in naturalistic settings (though some practitioners of the perspective, often called structural interactionists, use quantitative methods and experimental designs). SI has tended to be labeled as distinctly micro-oriented, rather than macro-oriented, although this label has changed in recent decades with the explicit push among some SI scholars toward meso-level theorizing. Another difference between SI and dominant sociology relates to epistemology. Dominant mid-century sociology was aligned with positivism, the epistemological assumption that the social sciences could be modeled after the biological and physical sciences to produce verifiable "facts" that explain social behavior and predict future behavior. SI, in contrast, is an interpretive perspective that allows for the agency inherent in human behavior and supports a methodology to study social behavior without demanding that it be definitively explained or predicted. One final contrast relates to the role of the researcher. Whereas positivist sociology believed in a value-neutral perspective—the social scientist's ability to separate values, beliefs, and interests from data collection and analysis—SI rejects the idea of a disembodied researcher and instead supports the idea that all science is done from a particular standpoint. The interactionist's job is to identify how bias, values, interests, and other intersubjective phenomena impact the research process and to acknowledge (if not highlight) that impact in her or his research questions, data collection and analysis techniques, and writing.

Pragmatist Roots of the Perspective

SI's theoretical paradigm owes much to pragmatist philosophers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries,

notably John Dewey, William James, and Charles Peirce. Pragmatism differed from classical rationalism, the dominant philosophy of that time, in a number of important ways, and understanding pragmatist epistemology and ontology provides an important step toward understanding the basic premises of SI. First, classical rationalism conceptualized reality in static, fixed terms. René Descartes argued that conscious, sense-based experiences were not to be trusted when studying reality. Rather, reality exists in an objective form that could be understood through deductive reasoning, separate of any sensory experience. Pragmatism, in contrast, conceptualized reality in terms of potentiality. Reality may be “out there,” but human beings can only understand its existence through sensory experience. Further, human beings are selective in what they notice about the world, thus different people may apprehend the same reality differently. For pragmatists, reality is what people make of it. Second and related to its conceptualization of reality, classical rationalism approached knowledge as separate from the knower. Some rationalists have argued that, given a basic set of scientific axioms, a person could deductively derive the rest of all possible knowledge in the world. In other words, rationalists believed that knowledge could be gained through reasoning alone. In contrast, pragmatists believe that reasoning cannot be separated from a person’s bodily experiences in the world. For pragmatists, knowledge is not a thing, but rather a process. From this, pragmatists argued against the rationalist assumption that an ultimate truth exists. Rather, pragmatists see the world as comprised of many truths that are carved out of reality by human activity. From this perspective, the role of science itself comes into question. For rationalists, science seeks to apprehend a static, objective reality and to comprehend it through its identifiable components. For pragmatists, however, science is value laden. If reality and truth are relative, then all scientists come to their research with beliefs, values, and morals that cannot simply be ignored or set aside. Science, for pragmatists, is a moral endeavor through which the human condition can be changed for better or worse. Scientists should not study the world for the sake of knowledge, but rather for the sake of improving the world in which people live. Scientists must also remain cognizant of the consequences of their research—this point is particularly germane to the fields of social scientific research.

Guiding Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

The scholar primarily responsible for translating the philosophical ideas of pragmatism into a workable social science was George Herbert Mead. Mead developed a social psychology that held crucial insights for the development of SI. First, human beings are the only animals capable of using language, understood as a complex system of symbols, and thus, are uniquely capable of manipulating, negotiating, and even transcending their physical environment through its use. Second, Mead argued that the human mind is as much an active, ongoing process as it is a mental structure. Human beings not only communicate with other people, but also communicate with themselves (i.e., self-reflexivity). The human ability to see oneself as an object of communication gives rise to the mind, which is not intrinsic and psychic, but processual and social in nature. This argument is a very different social psychology than behaviorism, for example, which sees human behaviors as reactions to environmental stimuli. The human ability for symbol use and the process-oriented nature of human action also highlights human agency. Human beings do not simply react to stimuli (although some human actions have instinctual roots), but instead assign meaning to objects in the world and then, based on the meanings assigned, act toward those objects in specific ways.

Herbert Blumer used Mead’s work, along with that of other social scientists such as William Isaac Thomas and Charles Horton Cooley, to develop SI into a distinctly sociological perspective. Blumer highlighted three premises that are foundational to the perspective. First, human beings act toward things based on the meaning they attribute to those things. Nothing has inherent meaning; rather, all meaning is assigned. When a female student walking on campus hears footsteps behind her, she must attribute meaning to the footsteps, and to the larger social situation, before acting toward those footsteps. If she is in the middle of a crowded student center in the middle of the day, she may likely dismiss the footsteps as normal or unimportant. But if she is in a secluded part of campus at night and alone, she might attribute a menacing or dangerous meaning to the footsteps. Second, the meanings people attribute to things arise out of social interaction. The potential meanings a person assigns are not arbitrary, but are learned. People learn

the meanings of things through face-to-face interaction with other people or with the thing itself or through various forms of mediated interaction, such as television, magazines, music, or the internet. Elijah Anderson's research on interracial interaction, for example, highlights how White people's fear of Black males is socially learned and oftentimes unjustified. Many Whites learn to fear Black males (often, through mediated interaction) without having any significant contact with them. Third, the meanings people attribute to things are handled through an interpretive process used by a person in specific situations. When a female student hears footsteps behind her at night or when a White woman sees several Black males walking toward her on an otherwise empty sidewalk, she will decide how to respond to them based on her own experiences and/or knowledge of similar situations. Reading about recent assaults or muggings may give her reason to feel afraid enough to cry for help. Or she may decide to ignore the what she has read or heard surrounding such alleged threats and treat the footsteps or men as nonthreatening.

In addition to Blumer's three premises, interactionists have subsequently discussed a larger set of guiding principles for the perspective. One is the idea that all social life is intersubjective. Human experiences are inextricably social in nature. Symbolic interactionist research has studied how even a person's most private thoughts are learned and given meaning through group life. A similar idea highlights the centrality of emotions to social life. Symbolic interactionists do not define emotions solely in biological terms. Instead, they understand that people's bodies are comprised of biological and physiological processes that are shaped by, and in turn shape, social action. Social action is itself another key term for interactionists; Blumer called it the fundamental unit of sociological analysis. Symbolic interactionists do not study individuals; they study the social actions in which individuals engage. Social actions are actions that take other people into account and include visible behaviors, as well as inner actions such as thoughts and emotions. Because most human actions take account of other people, SI provides an inductive explanation of the creation, maintenance, and change in society. Through the alignment of social action, society is created on a moment-by-moment basis by people acting socially. In short, symbolic interactionists see society as interaction. It is this emphasis on social action that most obviously highlights SI as a sociological perspective.

Finally, because symbolic interactionists study social action, they support the development of sociological methods that enable researchers to grasp the meanings that people come to attach to such action.

Methodological Traditions

Most interactionists do not believe that conventional scientific methods such as large-scale surveys or experimental designs yield sufficient insight into the intersubjective construction of reality, the self, or society, preferring naturalistic inquiry—research that focuses on people's behaviors in natural social settings. According to Blumer, naturalistic inquiry consists of two phases: exploration and inspection. During the exploration phase, interactionists work to familiarize themselves with the topic at hand, generally by becoming an "insider" of a particular social world. Exploration is a flexible process that allows the research to progress inductively. In order to understand pregnancy, for example, an interactionist would explore the social world of pregnancy in great detail. The researcher might observe and interact with pregnant women or couples, as well as examine literature, television shows, films, or other popular sources of portrayals of pregnancy. The researcher might attend parenthood classes, interview expecting parents, or even record the process of pregnancy autoethnographically, either as a pregnant woman or through a significant other. Throughout the exploration phase, the goal is to learn to understand the topic being studied from the perspective of the people who are active participants of that world. What is sociologically significant about the data recorded becomes clearer in Blumer's second phase, inspection, which refers to the process of analyzing the data collected during exploration. Fieldnotes, interview transcripts, documents and other data sources are all scrutinized as the interactionist engages in the creative process of establishing sensitizing concepts: concepts that are grounded in what the interactionist thinks is most significant or relevant about the data and which offer an analytic frame for understanding the social phenomena being studied. Exploration and inspection are not temporally ordered, but overlap as the researcher continuously inspects collected data and modifies the exploration process as necessary.

The findings of such a study are usually written and disseminated as an ethnographic text. Ethnography was developed by sociologists such as Thomas and Robert Park, who worked at the University of Chicago during

the same time as Mead. The so-called Chicago School of sociology, referred to either as the spark behind SI or as the incarnation of SI itself, is best known for its legacy of ethnographic research on everyday urban life. Although Mead's and Thomas's work offered a coherent interpretivist approach to sociological research, Park turned his training in journalism and philosophy into a methodology for describing lived experience. Often-cited examples of this tradition include Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's (1918–1920) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Frederick Thrasher's (1927) *The Delinquent Gang*, Paul Cressey's (1932) *The Taxi-Dance Hall*, and William Foote Whyte's (1943) *Street Corner Society*.

Another important qualitative tradition that emerged from SI is grounded theory. Developed originally by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their 1967 book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, grounded theory emphasizes the development of theory through method. Grounded theory is a more robust approach than Blumer's exploration and inspection because it moves beyond developing sensitizing concepts to generating inductively derived meso or macrolevel theories of the social world. Grounded theory consists of the researcher exploring and analyzing data from cases, coming up with provisional concepts to explain what is going on, then studying new cases to see whether the provisional concepts remain satisfactory. The researcher continues to study new cases until the point of saturation, at which point the concepts become valid and a theory may be constructed.

Theoretical Extensions

Using the methods cited above, and others, symbolic interactionists have engaged in many types of sociologically informed scholarship, from theoretical to applied, from apolitical to critical and action-oriented. The following stand as a sample of the variety of ways in which interactionist-informed research has developed over the past half-century. First, the sociological study of the self and identity took a new direction under the influence of Erving Goffman, whose dramaturgical perspective studies social interaction through theatrical metaphor. Goffman's work highlights the contingent and situational aspects of the self by studying how identities are strategically presented and manipulated by people in order to accomplish collective action. Second, the ethnographic study of delinquency, developed in the Chicago School, received a more critical

interactionist eye by Howard Becker, who developed labeling theory to illustrate the social roots and functions of deviance. In line with traditional SI tenets, Becker highlights how deviant behavior is culturally and situationally defined by people who collectively agree on social rules and then apply deviant labels to those who do not conform. A third example is Arlie Hochschild's theory of emotions and emotion management. Furthering Goffman's metaphor of people "acting" in situations, Hochschild studies the emotional work in which people engage as they go through everyday life. Making oneself feel sad at a funeral or smiling when one would like to scream are but two examples of how individuals modify their behaviors to conform to the larger social structure.

Each of these theoretical strands has led to new fields of sociological scholarship that are often populated by scholars who do not self-identify as symbolic interactionists, though their work is implicitly informed by interactionist theory. In recent years, some scholars have been more explicit in identifying the symbolic interactionist roots of their work. One example is the intersection of SI and feminism, which results in a feminist interactionism as practiced by scholars such as Sherryll Kleinman. Other interactionists such as Michael Schwalbe have drawn on neo-Marxian theory to develop a more critical interactionism that focuses explicitly on the social processes through which inequalities are constructed. A final example is Norman Denzin's interpretive interactionism, which blends SI and critical social theory (i.e., neo-Marxist, feminist, antirace) with postmodernist preoccupations including an emphasis on people's interactions with(in) mass, communication, and new media technologies.

SI is a perspective with broad sociological significance. It theorizes the self and identity, socialization and culture, community and collective behavior, deviance and inequality, and more generally society-as-process by studying the creation and communication of meaning. With the increasingly blurred boundaries between traditional social science disciplines, SI has the potential to make an even greater impact on fields such as education, gender and minority studies, cultural studies, psychology, and communication and new media studies, among others.

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See also Autoethnography; Emotions in Qualitative Research; Ethnography, Grounded Theory; Interpretive Inquiry; Pragmatism

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SYSTEMATIC SOCIOLOGICAL INTROSPECTION

Systematic sociological introspection refers to the process of thinking about thinking and feeling about feeling in a focused way in order to examine the lived experiences of the self. It is the primary method connected with autoethnographic writing, where researchers write about their bodies, thoughts, and feelings in evocative narratives that invite readers to experience their experiences. Systematic sociological introspection relies on ethnographic guidelines for recording and writing about experience and on phenomenological and sociological understanding for contextualizing and interpreting what that experience means. This entry focuses on the history of introspection in sociology and on the development and application of systematic sociological introspection in autoethnographic research.

Sociological insight has been built on the introspective methods of its forebears in philosophy and psychology. Yet modern theorists often have neglected Charles H. Cooley's affective orientation and introspective

method for George H. Mead's more cognitive emphasis and technique of understanding humans by studying what they do. The rejection of introspection as a technique, along with the neglect of introspection as an object of study in the form of thoughts and feelings, came from the idea that sociology should define as its territory rational action and social facts that exist outside of individual consciousness.

Sociologists also reacted against introspection because they viewed it as a psychological process that implied self-contained internal events. But the psychological approach ignored the socially constructed, processual nature of thoughts, feelings, and introspection. Viewed as process, introspection, like any thinking, is covert communicative behavior. As private, inner dialogue, it is enabled by publicly shared significant symbols and thus is inherently social. Psychologists who used introspection presented it as an inward activity, a way to investigate how an individual mind had constructed the world. Psychology deemphasized the self-dialogue inherent in introspection, underplayed the impact of shared symbols on people's response to their selves in inner conversation, and excluded the role of external norms and social structure.

Nevertheless, the gate in sociology never has been closed entirely to introspection. Some sociological traditions have maintained that understanding the meaning of one's own experience and empathically interpreting meaning in the experience of others constitute bases for inquiry. For example, Charles H. Cooley advocated sympathetic introspection, a process by which one comes to understand others by sympathetically ascribing to them one's own response in similar situations. Ethnographic, feminist, hermeneutic, and social constructionist approaches continue laying the groundwork for investigating emotions, thoughts, and subjective meaning.

In the past two decades, interpretive social scientists, such as Arthur Bochner, Norman Denzin, Carolyn Ellis, H. L. Goodall, Ronald Pelias, and Laurel Richardson more openly and passionately have embraced subjectivity as both a subject of study and a vital part of the methods for studying self and social life. Carolyn Ellis, for example, argues that introspection is a social process as well as a psychological one. Introspection is actively thinking about one's thoughts and feelings; it emerges from social interaction; it occurs in response to bodily sensations, mental processes, and external stimuli as well as affecting