

Indeed, in the case of alcohol and Prohibition, the urban immigrants had counter norms. The drinking behavior that the temperance movement sought to end occurred in communities in which the temperance advocates were unlikely to live and the laws were not likely to be enforced. A norm cannot be effectively enforced in a location where the majority of people have counter norms and the norms are seen as illegitimate.

Laws regulating abortion and drugs and blue laws are examples of attempts to legislate morality and, for most of those involved with these attempts, symbolic crusades. The defeat of temperance was not caused by immigrants but by the defection of this status group's own members. Status groups are loose collectives. They are formed on the basis of sentiments rather than concrete objectified interests, as with economic groups. Commitment is less structured. The campaign for national prohibition had a polarizing effect on the temperance movement—it maximized the cultural differences between pro- and anti-Temperance forces while minimizing the class differences. Eventually, many who were originally pro-Prohibition became anti-Prohibition.

Factors contributing to the eventual repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment included the advent of the Great Depression and the need for tax revenue from the sale of alcohol and a growing urban voting block that did not support Prohibition.

Drinking is now a middle-class custom, as well as a custom among all classes. The Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Prohibitionist Party are still active today. Their aims are to bring back fundamentalist values, but their crusades have changed—they are antiabortion, support prayer in schools, and oppose the use of drugs and alcohol. What has occurred is a normative change in the designation of deviance; during the past 80 years, there has not been much change in American drinking patterns, generally, what have changed are the class backgrounds of those who support temperance. In 1885, the Women's Christian Temperance Union was composed of mostly professionals and managers, in a country with a small middle class. By 1950, with a growing middle class, the percentage of middle-class members had fallen to below 25% and has continued to drop. Hence, deviant drinking patterns may have shifted culturally, but the designator of deviance is still social class.

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See also Conflict Theory; Defining Deviance; Labeling Approach; Prohibition

Further Reading

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SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Symbolic interactionism (SI) is an approach to social science adopted by a variety of scholars, mostly from sociology, social psychology, and communications. The term *symbolic interactionism* unites 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 species has the ability to arbitrarily assign meaning to objects, transforming them into elements of social action. *Interaction* highlights the significance of interpersonal communication in transmitting the meaning of symbols. Through interaction, culture arises. Interactionists understand culture to be a shared system of meaning that constitutes everyday life. The sociologist 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 renewing, shaping, or creating culture. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, then, human beings are unique in their active creation and manipulation of symbols and culture. This entry discusses the origins of SI as a sociological perspective, its epistemological premises, and methodological tradition and then examines the application of SI to deviance.

Origins

As a theoretical perspective, SI was originally developed in the early half of the 20th century by scholars at the University of Chicago and was grounded in the study of the meanings that people assigned to the objects and actions that surrounded their everyday experiences. SI was originally conceptualized by the University of Chicago philosopher George Herbert Mead, although he never used the

term. The perspective was first given coherence after Mead's death in 1931 by his students at 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, which is still widely acknowledged as a primary statement on the perspective.

Mead's own preferred description for his work was *social behaviorism*, which he contrasted with the radical behaviorist psychology of J. B. Watson. Watson argued that "mind" was a redundant metaphysical notion and that all action could be explained in terms of responses to stimuli. Mead objected that there was an important difference in the processing of incoming stimuli by humans compared with the animals studied by behaviorist psychologists. Animals treated stimuli as *signs*, information about the world that directly triggered behavioral responses. Humans mostly responded to stimuli as *symbols*, signals that required cognitive transformation before becoming the basis of action. Thus for Mead, "mind" represented the intervening process between the perception of a stimulus and a person's response to it. Further emphasizing a social, rather than psychological, dimension for the human mind, Mead also stressed the extent to which the meaning of acts was not derived from the actor's intention. An actor would design an act in *imagined* anticipation of the response of its projected recipient or audience. However, the meaning of that act would only emerge from the *actual* response and might be further revised by the producer's subsequent self-correction. The act of speech, for example, involves organizing utterances into blocks that stand for, or symbolize, the actor's imaginative projection of a hearer's response. For these blocks to function as potentially shareable communicative symbols, they must form part of an *intersubjective* cultural system, of which language is a familiar and oft-cited example. This system is socially constructed and is learned through the process of socialization. Many classic interactionist studies of deviance focused at least in part on the socialization process through which individuals learn new cultural systems and thereby how to attach unconventional meanings to social objects.

Epistemological Premises

During its emergence in the 1930s, SI offered a radical conceptualization of social theory in the face of macro-, structural, and positivist sociology and the biological and behavioral models of psychology. Dominant midcentury sociology and psychology were aligned with positivism, which assumed 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. Symbolic interactionists typically collect and analyze qualitative data from people's experiences in naturalistic settings, though some practitioners of the perspective, often called structural interactionists, do use quantitative methods and experimental designs. SI has tended to be labeled as distinctly micro-oriented, rather than macro-oriented, although this has changed in recent decades with the explicit push among some SI scholars toward mesolevel theorizing. Another difference that has emerged over the past few decades especially relates to the role of the researcher. Whereas positivist science has emphasized a value-neutral perspective—the social scientist's ability to separate one's values, beliefs, and interests from data collection and analysis—most symbolic interactionists embrace the notion that research is a situated, contextual practice from which the researcher cannot easily extricate herself or himself. Researchers must therefore identify how biases, values, interests, and other intersubjective phenomena affect the research process and acknowledge (if not highlight) that impact in their research questions, data collection and analysis techniques, and writing.

Three premises, as defined by Blumer, are considered 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 televisions, 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 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 "hype" 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 made up 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

As alluded to previously, 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 instead 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, the interactionist works to familiarize herself or himself with the topic at hand, generally by becoming an "insider" of a particular social world. 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. Field notes, 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 that 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 an approach are often written and disseminated as ethnographic texts. Ethnography was developed within sociology, in parallel with its formulation in anthropology, by W. I. 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. While Mead's and Thomas's works 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, but are not limited to, Frederick Thrasher's (1927) *The Delinquent Gang*, Clifford Shaw's (1930) *The Jack Roller*, Paul Cressey's (1932) *The Taxi-Dance Hall*, and William Foote Whyte's (1943) *Street Corner Society*. With the exception of the former, these studies are also considered key classic texts in the study of deviance.

Symbolic Interactionism and Deviance

The studies just mentioned are representative of the so-called Chicago school tradition of American sociology, a tradition which spawned overlapping developments in both SI and the sociology of deviance. Perhaps the most significant theory to arise out of this tradition is labeling theory, which was coherently formulated in Becker's (1963) *Outsiders*. Utilizing data from interrelated studies of marijuana smoking and dance musicians (social worlds within which Becker was a self-acknowledged "insider"), labeling theory demonstrates the interactionist assumption that deviance is not objectively real but rather is a distinctly social phenomenon based on how people apply meaning to events, behaviors, or attributes and subsequently react to them. As Becker pointed out, the behaviors characteristic of many dance musicians in his day, including their preference for "negro" music, their use of recreational drugs, and their self-chosen isolation from mainstream others became deviant to the extent that they were labeled as such by those who held power over the musicians' lives and livelihood. More broadly, labeling theory posits that deviance is a social and moral process and that events, behaviors, or attributes are *constructed as* deviant through a series of steps. Each step is a necessary component of the labeling process, which is conceptualized in a fixed order. As such, labeling theory was an important part of the emergence of social constructionism as a sociological perspective in the 1960s along with books like Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality*. SI and social constructionism share many common assumptions about deviance.

We can utilize an ambiguous example such as having sex—an event—to highlight the socially constructed rather than natural foundations of deviance. Similar examples could be used for a behavior (e.g., drinking alcohol) or an attribute (e.g., being obese).

First, certain events, behaviors, or attributes must be banned by agents of social control, either formally or informally. For example, some families, religions, and other institutions ban certain individuals from having sex. The ban is a necessary condition for deviance to arise, and without the ban in place, there could be no deviance to speak of. Second (i.e., once an event, behavior, or attribute has been banned), it must next be detected to be identified or categorized as a problem. A sexual encounter that is kept secret or hidden is not subject to moral judgment. If it were to be observed, then the potential would exist for it to be labeled deviant. Next, however, a specific meaning must be attributed to what has been detected. In other words, social actors will decide whether a particular event, behavior, or attribute is deviant or not. A married couple having sex with each other in the privacy of their bedroom is typically defined as normal, while a married couple having sex with a third person is more likely (though not necessarily) to be defined as deviant. Similarly, the meanings attached to consuming alcohol are not universal—some parents may find their teenager drinking and label the behavior as part of growing up, while other parents may define it as gross misconduct. Once these three steps—banning, detecting, and attributing intent—are complete, meaning has been successfully assigned to the event, behavior, or attribute and labeling has thus occurred. Subsequently, social actions can occur on the basis of such meanings.

Symbolic interactionists (and social constructionists more broadly) are interested in both the interpretive processes through which deviance is created and negotiated on the one hand and the social action that they facilitate on the other. Social reactions toward deviance come in many forms and degrees, depending on the type of deviance in question. Some social reactions are informal; for example, a simple look from a parent can communicate disappointment in a child's behavior and lead the child to feel shame or guilt. Other reactions are more organized or formalized, such as when communities throughout Europe and North America concertedly labeled some thousands of women as witches in the 14th and 17th centuries and enacted a variety of punishments on them, including execution. In both of these examples, social reaction represents attempts by those engaged in labeling to exert control over those labeled as deviant in order to restore the social or moral order. Interactionists argue that it is impossible to explain processes of social control without

understanding the meanings relied on to construct the boundaries between normal and deviant behavior. The outcomes of labeling are keenly felt by those affected by both informal and formal methods of social control. Bullying and hazing among adolescents are at an all-time high, as is the number of individuals in U.S. federal prisons for drug-related crimes. A symbolic interactionist approach to these facts would emphasize that the victims of bullying, and those convicted of drug crimes are similar to the extent that they exhibit attributes or engage in behaviors that are defined as socially unacceptable. Drug offenders are not deviant because of drug use per se but rather because of the type of drug they use (there are many legal drugs, e.g., alcohol) or their behaviors as a result of using drugs. Bullying victims may be labeled because of their appearance, their social networks, or because of identification with a stigmatized racial, religious, or other group. Such "deviants," of course, may adopt various strategies to resist or subvert these labels, either by challenging the rights of the labeler to do so or by celebrating

their deviance. One might think of how alternative-thinking youths get together and form subcultural groups as a form of collective resistance, or how gays and lesbians have successfully challenged psychiatrists to exclude their preferred sexuality from the list of mental disorders while simultaneously asserting their right to this orientation through "gay pride."

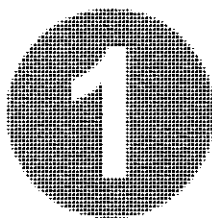
J. Patrick Williams and Robert Dingwall

See also Defining Deviance; Labeling Approach

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