

Symbolic Interactionism:

Symbolic interactionism has its roots in the thinking of the pragmatic philosophers of the nineteenth century. It was initially brought into Sociology through the work of Charles Horton Cooley (1902). Cooley's work was followed by that of George Herbert Mead, who is most often credited as being the founder of symbolic interactionism and the author of one of the most meaningful descriptions of the concept "society" (Mead 1934) . This is a complicated theoretical perspective with multiple schools of thought within it and important applications at both micro and macro levels. I will focus on a few concepts most pertinent to social problems.

Out of the interaction process the self emerges and people learn how to control their identities, impact the identities of others, control situations, and socially construct and control reality. These are not minor accomplishments and they have great implications for numerous social problems issues.

Social Construction of Reality:

An important part of conflict theory is the notion that people in positions of power and wealth use that power and wealth to control public perceptions about reality. A goal of the wealthy is to get the people who do not have wealth and power to accept, without question, the extreme difference in resource distribution between themselves and the wealthy. Symbolic interactionism helps us understand more fully how wealth and power combine to actually create a preferred reality for the privileged few. The term "social construction of reality" is often used within macro contexts involving large social entities such as communities, states, very large organizations, or nation-states. It is one thing to impact how a person's family and friends see that person, but controlling how an entire population views some aspect of reality, such as high unemployment, poverty, war, diminished social services, national debt, free trade, or the decisions of a president relating to these issues, is another matter altogether. Is a superstructure actually possible i.e. a socially constructed false reality? The macro social construction of reality is not easy or cheap, but it is possible and happens routinely. In an earlier discussion under conflict theory, it was mentioned that controlling reality on a scale as large as a nation-state requires controlling the media and the educational system. What is the symbolic process that employs media and schools in the construction of social reality?

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