Projects and Discussion Questions

The following forms include materials that students will work with in and outside of class. Please print all of these forms and bring this set, along with the Power Point slides located on the other link from the Society and the Individual syllabus home page, to all of our classes. Students are responsible for doing this themselves.
Key Perspectives and Concepts/Terms

Every discipline has a set of theoretical perspectives and concepts that provide people in the field with a nomenclature (set of terms, language) for communicating their ideas about their subject matter. I’ve listed some of the basic terms you will read, hear, and use in this class. I encourage you to make the effort to become comfortable with these terms because they represent the perspectives and concepts that are central to this course. You will need to develop a deep understanding of this nomenclature to do well in this course. Make sure that you can create your own examples for the concepts listed here.

Theoretical Perspectives

1. symbolic interactionism
2. social exchange
3. interaction ritual chain model (IRC)

Concepts

1. social structure
2. social process
3. negotiated order
4. definition of the situation
5. symbol
6. significant symbol
7. intersubjectivity
8. status
9. role
10. role taking
11. role making
12. role exit (disengagement and disidentification)
13. socialization (primary and secondary)
14. self
15. identity
16. identity salience
17. psychological centrality
18. commitment
19. self esteem
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In-class Small Group Project:
Working with the Theoretical Perspectives

PRINT YOUR NAMES AND YOUR MATERIAL FOR THIS EXERCISE ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER (I will collect these separate sheets)

Now that we’ve discussed symbolic interactionism (SI), social exchange (SE), and the interaction ritual chain model (IRC), it’s time to put your understanding of these perspectives to the test.

1. In your small groups, I want you to begin this project by sharing with each other some of the questions you have about interpersonal interactions that intrigue you (puzzle you) the most and are important socially, e.g., I wonder why men [or certain categories of men–based on age, race, education, etc.] tend to.....; I wonder why women [or certain categories of women–based on age, race, education, etc.] tend to ......; I wonder why parents often.....; I wonder why strangers frequently.....? As you think about these or other questions you will need to identify the context within which the social activity/exchange is taking place (dating relationship, face-to-face communication in the home, meetings in public places, formal competitions, etc.). Once you’ve decided as a group on one research question write it down.

2. Next, you should identify one of the theoretical perspectives listed above and develop an outline (use bullet points) to EXPLAIN in DETAIL what key ideas you would use to help you organize your thinking about the research question you've chosen. Assume that you are going to be conducting a research project to answer this question. If you were actually going to conduct a study and collect data, what key assumptions would you want to make to guide you as you prepared your study (e.g., Do you want to assume that individuals will act rationally in the situation of interest to you? What about the importance of emotions or people working together to construct the meaning of a situation? What concepts would be appropriate to use in this context? You need to clarify WHY you’ve made these choices. Look back through your notes.

3. Finally, can you see any value in incorporating one of the other perspectives into your project? If so, explain your reasoning for selecting this second perspective. How does it fit with the first perspective you’ve chosen?

4. I will select one or more groups to present their project to the entire class, so please prepare your materials in an organized fashion.
In-class Small Group Project:  
Value-weighted Talk

People talk about a range of topics to their friends, peers, acquaintances, strangers, co-workers, family members, etc. One way of thinking about this “talk” is to try to differentiate the types of things people communicate about.

In this exercise I would like you to think about the types of talk listed below and rank order them according to which ones you feel are the least intimate (most impersonal) to the ones that you believe require the greatest amount of intimacy and trust. As you rank order them, you should feel free to qualify your answers by identifying situational factors or other issues that shape your reasoning. Please clarify the basis for your reasoning.

Place a number by each of the letters below using the following scale:

1 = least intimate, most impersonal  
6 = greatest amount of intimacy and trust

____ A. Discussing political, religious, or other areas of value commitments
____ B. Practical talk as part of the work situation
____ C. Narrating one’s own personal experiences and feelings
____ D. Talking about entertainment, or doing entertainment talk (joking)
____ E. Gossiping about events related to personal acquaintances
____ F. Commenting on some fact of the external world (weather, community)
In-class Individual Project: Pets and the Self

Name (Please Print)_____________________________________

In what ways have past or present pets that you have owned influenced your constructions of self? How have they influenced your interactions with others? If you have never owned a pet, in what ways have close friends or relatives been influenced by their pets?
In-class Small Group Exercise:
Managing the Stigma of HIV/AIDS

I want you to begin the following exercise by describing a hypothetical U.F. student according to the following characteristics (DO THIS PART QUICKLY):

1. Name
2. Gender
3. Age
4. Race/ethnicity
5. Family background (ie., parents and siblings)
6. Sexual orientation
7. Year in school
8. Major/career plans
9. Current dating/marital status
10. Three major hobbies person enjoys
11. Identify 3-4 major personality traits

Now, assume that this person has just discovered that he/she tested HIV positive. Using as many of Goffman’s concepts as possible, prepare a detailed description of this person’s personal and social experiences during the next year. You are free to develop whatever type of scenario/story you would like, but it needs to be informed by the characteristics you assigned to the hypothetical student.
In-class Small Group Project:  
Goffman’s Dramaturgical Approach, Impression Management, and Teams

Now that we have completed our discussion of Goffman’s Dramaturgical approach I would like you to demonstrate your working knowledge of the numerous concepts he introduced that deal with a team’s efforts to present a specific type of performance. I want you to do the following:

1. Select someone to write your material on a SEPARATE sheet of paper–you will be submitting this assignment to me at the end of the period. Print all of your names on this sheet.

2. Identify an interesting team oriented performance that you wish to use for your project. The team performance should deal with some type of stigma. The team can be as small as a two-person dyad or significantly larger. Please do NOT choose an example having to do with a restaurant staff since we already discussed this example extensively in class.

3. Next, I want you to develop an analytic essay (using bullet points) that incorporates the key concepts associated with Goffman’s dramaturgical approach to team performances. In the process, you should also synthesize into your presentation some of the more relevant concepts related to stigmas.

4. Finally, re-read your analytic essay and figure out what three specific features of your example would be intriguing to focus on in a research study. Present your creative thoughts in the form of three research questions (e.g., To what extent does the gender composition of a wait-person team affect the likelihood that it will use “staging talk” strategies?).
In-class Small Group Exercise:  
Role Exit Process

In this small group exercise, I would like you to demonstrate your understanding of Ebaugh's role exit process. As a group I want you to choose one main role exit experience (in some cases you may also want to identify other role exit experiences that are associated with the primary one). You need to choose something other than divorce or transsexuals' experiences (be creative). I then want you to develop an analytic essay (using bullet points) that describes and sociologically examines how a particular hypothetical person might experience this role exit. Prepare this essay on a separate sheet of paper and print your names at the top.

You will need to address and say something about the following:

1. Key themes of disengagement and disidentification

2. Major moments (first doubts, seeking alternatives, the turning point, and creating the ex-role)

3. The descriptive properties that are related to the role exiting phenomenon (reversibility, duration, single versus multiple exits, individual versus group, degree of control, social desirability, degree of institutionalization, degree of awareness, sequentiality, centrality of the role, and voluntariness)

4. Incorporate at least five other social psychological concepts that you have learned in this course into your analysis
Dr. Marsiglio  
Society and the Individual  
Discussion Questions: Set #1

1. What sets us (humans) apart from other species?

2. What does it mean to say that people rely on “islands of meaning?” How do they affect our lives?

3. When we think about making sense out of something and giving meaning to events, situations, experiences, types of people, etc., what general processes come into play?

4. What does it mean to say that people need to recognize GAPS to make sense of reality?

5. What are boundaries? Are they inherent? What purpose do they serve?
Dr. Marsiglio  
Society and the Individual  
Discussion Questions: Set #2

1. What are the essential features/phases of Charles Horton Cooley’s looking-glass self concept? How does this concept inform our discussions of the self as being socially constructed?

2. How are Mead’s ideas about the “self” as social structure and process similar to Cooley’s notion of the looking-glass self? What does Mead say about the “I,” “me,” and the “generalized other?” How do they fit into his theory of the self?

3. When do children typically establish their gender identity? How does “personal front” influence the process of acquiring a gender identity? How do aligning actions sometimes come into play when young children experiment with their personal fronts?
Dr. William Marsiglio
Society and the Individual
Discussion Questions: Set #3

1. What is the basis for Vygotsky’s departure from Piaget’s thinking on children’s thought and speech? How do egocentric and communicative strategies affect his view of individuals?

2. Howard Becker’s well-known research on marijuana users moves us away from a pharmacological interpretation of drug use and human behavior. What does Becker suggest in its place? How does the concept “definition of the situation” fit into a symbolic interactionist view of drug use?

3. What emotion management strategies do medical students tend to use in their training? How can you introduce and relate the concepts of secondary socialization and feeling rules into your understanding of medical students’ training?
Dr. William Marsiglio  
Society and the Individual  
Discussion Questions/Exercises: Set #4

1. What is the essence of studying social interaction from a dramaturgical framework? What is the key metaphor being used? What does it mean to say that people assume that social interaction has a “moral character” to it?

2. Try to think about one celebrity of your choice (e.g., movie star, athlete, musician) and discuss how the “glorified self” concept is relevant to him/her? How do the reflect self and media self play a part in your understanding of the process associated with the creation of a “glorified self”?

3. Homeless people are typically stigmatized and they have few means to develop a sense of moral worth and dignity. Nevertheless, Snow and Anderson suggest that homeless people do find a way to develop a sense of moral worth and dignity. How do they accomplish this feat? What specific types of identity work do they use? Why is fictive storytelling sometimes a viable option for homeless persons?

4. How does the transgender community and specific therapeutic support groups provide a structure for transsexuals to experience and construct their selves?

5. Think of a role-exiting process you or someone close to you has experienced and comment on this process using the concepts Ebaugh introduces.
1. How are social encounters and social relationships related to one another? What are categorical identities and why are they important? How is the concept “altercasting” relevant to a discussion about categorical identities?

2. What is the process of “nomos-building” and how is it relevant to a discussion of coupling and uncoupling? How is Vaughan’s perspective related to Ebaugh’s discussion of role exit? What are the key features of: initiation of the process, accompanying reconstructions, trying, objectivation?

3. What is nature of a “socioemotional economy”? What are the key features of a sympathy etiquette?
1) What are the three techniques that mental patients use to maintain positive self-definitions, according to Goffman's “The Moral Career of the Mental Patient?” Compare and contrast these techniques with the identity talk that Anderson and Snow observed among homeless people. How does the staff at the mental hospitals influence patients' self-conceptions? How does this compare to the experiences of homeless people?

2) In the article “Taking Anti-Depressant Drugs,” Karp illustrates the ways in which individuals who are prescribed anti-depressant drugs constantly redefine themselves. In what ways does being prescribed anti-depressant drugs cause individuals to sacrifice their sense of personal efficacy? How do they later incorporate the “conceptual machinery” of biomedicine into their self-definitions? In what ways might the prescription of other drugs for different physical problems cause individuals to go through similar changes in their self-conceptions?

3) In the article “The Dissolution of the Self,” what does Gergen mean in saying that post-modern society causes individuals to experience "multiphrenia?" What is "multiphrenia?" What are its causes? What is the "postmodern being?" Can you think of any examples in which you personally have experienced multiphrenia or the postmodern being?