Symbolic Interactionism Reading Guide

Introduction

This document consists of the weekly reading guides I prepared for my graduate seminar on Symbolic Interactionism (Soc 525C) at Iowa State University during Fall 2013.

The reading guides attempt to provide context for the readings found in the online coursepack available to my students. The boldfaced readings were the core readings we all read each week and discussed in class.

Full citations for all mentioned articles are available in the course syllabus, which is currently here:

www.public.iastate.edu/~dschwein/SIsyllabus.pdf

A reading list of this length might suggest some claim of comprehensiveness so I want to disavow that notion. I am already aware of omissions and gaps I hope to fill if I ever have the opportunity to teach the class again. In addition, the list is shaped by the need to organize the readings around 13 particular topics and by my own prejudices about interactionism and what a good interactionist article looks like, as well the gaps in my own exploration of the perspective.

This reading guide is currently available here:

www.public.iastate.edu/~dschwein/SIreadingguide.pdf

— David Schweingruber

dschwein@iastate.edu
Week 1: Course Overview

The first two core readings for this week are essays by leading interactionists. Both give a positive report on the current state and future prospects of the perspective but with different emphases.

Gary Alan Fine’s “The Sad Demise, Mysterious Disappearance, and Glorious Triumph of Symbolic Interactionism” appeared in the Annual Review of Sociology in 1993. Later in the class we will read Fine’s research on restaurant kitchens and high school debate teams. Fine’s earlier overview of SI, which appeared in a 1990 volume edited by George Ritzer, is included as a bonus reading.

David Maines’ “Interactionism’s Place” appeared in a 2003 special issue of Symbolic Interaction. This issue featured essays by winners of the George Herbert Mead Career Award, which is given by the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction. Each author was invited to write on “your views on symbolic interactionism during the 20th century and the directions you would like to see it take in the 21st century.” Each essay was followed with a comment by another symbolic interactionist. Jeffery Ulmer’s comment on Maine’s essay, “Demarginalizing Symbolic Interactionism,” is included as a bonus reading. The entire special issue is included in the course pack (under “Mead Award Winner Essays”).

I chose the third reading, Scott Harris’ chapter in the Handbook of Constructionist Research (2007), “Constructionism in Sociology: Objective and Interpretive Forms,” in order to situate symbolic interactionism within social constructionism more generally. Although SI isn’t the only sociological perspective to take constructionism into consideration, constructionism is central to SI’s identity (as in Herbert Blumer’s three premises) and its research. Harris’ chapter is a succinct explanation of constructionism and an incisive analysis of how it is used in sociology. His dichotomy of interpretive vs. objective varieties of constructionism will prove useful throughout the class. (Later in the class, we’ll read Harris’ research on marital inequality.)

There are many articles in which the author(s) explain what they think are the distinctive features of SI. Our fourth reading, “Organizing Door-to-Door Sales: A Symbolic Interactionist Analysis” from Peter Kivisto’s theory reader Illuminating Social Life (5th ed.), sets itself apart from others in this genre because it explains what I think are its distinctive features. I co-wrote it with Nancy Berns and it represents our summary of interactionism as illustrated by our research on door-to-door sales.

Also included as a bonus reading is David Snow’s (2001) “Extending and Broadening Blumer’s Conceptualization of Symbolic Interactionism,” in which he suggests “four broader and more inclusive orienting principles that Blumer’s conceptualization implies but does not fully articulate.” Later in the class we will look at Snow’s research on social movements and homelessness.

Snow’s article resulted in a response from Kevin Mihata (2002), “Emergence and Complexity in Interactionism,” in which he argues that interactionists “ask complex questions.”

In Maines’ (2000) essay on “The Social Construction of Meaning,” he argues that all sociologists now take social constructionism into account. (This essay is one of Harris’ foils.)

Sheldon Stryker’s 1987 article “The Vitalization of Symbolic Interactionism” is adopted from the address he gave upon the occasion of winning the Cooley-Mead Award, which is presented for career achievement by the ASA’s Section on Social Psychology. Stryker is a leading advocate for a structural symbolic interactionism and this emphasis should be apparent in the essay. We will encounter Stryker again during our week on structural symbolic interactionism.
Week 2: Origins and Principles (The Chicago School)

The term “symbolic interactionism” was coined 76 years ago by Herbert Blumer, who later called the name “a somewhat barbaric neologism that I coined in an offhand way.” Blumer claimed that his perspective represented the views of his teacher, the pragmatist philosopher George Herbert Mead. Blumer’s version of SI is typically referred to as the Chicago School of Symbolic Interactionism since Mead, Blumer and many other early contributors to it were University of Chicago faculty.

SI arose out of two important influences at the Chicago sociology department. The first was the impact of pragmatist philosophy, which was represented by Mead and John Dewey. The other influence was a program of ethnographic research on social life in the city of Chicago. Before World War II, Robert Park was a key contributor to this tradition. After the war, a key figure was Park’s student, Everett C. Hughes.

Two background readings from the Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism (2003) provide an overview of the origins of SI. In Larry Reynolds’ chapter on “Early Representatives,” he treats Mead, along with Charles Horton Cooley (of “looking-glass self” fame) and W.I. Thomas (“definition of the situation”), who was also at Chicago, as “the three figures whose influence on symbolic interactionism arguably looms largest.” Gil Richard Musolf’s chapter on “The Chicago School” provides information about the development and tenets of that school.

In the post-war period, Blumer and Hughes were major figures in the training of Chicago graduate students, who included Howard S. Becker and Erving Goffman. Blumer provided the intellectual foundation of SI but conducted very little research, while Hughes carried out a large research program and provided research training to graduate students. The two reportedly did not like each other.

The core readings will focus on four major early figures connected to the Chicago School of SI: Mead, Blumer, Hughes and Becker.

We will read two of Mead’s papers, “The Social Self” (1913) and “A Behavioristic Account of the Significant Symbol” (1922). Both were published in his Selected Writings (1964), which collects papers he published during his lifetime. (Mead’s most famous book, Mind, Self, and Society [1934], is based on course notes from his social psychology class at Chicago.)


Three commentaries on Mead’s ideas are also included. Lonnie Athens, the “maverick criminologist,” provides a discussion of “Mead’s Lost Conception of Society” (2005), David Maines, Noreen Sugrue, and Michael Katovich explicate “The Sociological Import of G.H. Mead’s Theory of the Past” (1983), and Gary Alan Fine and Sherryl Kleinman ask “Can There Be a ‘True’ Meaning of Mead?” (1986).

Blumer’s interpretation of Mead is on display in “Sociological Implications of the Thought of George Herbert Mead” (1966). (Blumer’s role as Mead’s interpreter is contested. In the “Great Debates” section of the course pack, I have included two exchanges on this issue. The first, Blumer vs. Bales, was sparked by this Blumer article. The second is Blumer’s exchange with Clark McPhail and Cynthia Rexroat.)

Seven of the bonus readings are commentaries on Blumer. The most interesting may be Joel Best’s “Blumer’s Dilemma: The Critic as a Tragic Figure” (2006). Best calls Blumer a tragic figure because he was “wedded to theoretical principles that cannot be put into practice.” The others are all articles published shortly after his death in 1987. Five are from a special 1988 issue of Symbolic Interaction: Howard Becker’s “Herbert Blumer’s Conceptual Impact,” David Maine’s “Myth, Text, and Interaction Complicity in the Neglect of Blumer’s Macrosociology,” Tamotsu Shibutani’s “Herbert Blumer’s Contributions to Twentieth-Century Sociology,” Sheldon Stryker’s “Substance and Style: An Appraisal of the Sociological Legacy of Herbert Blumer,” and Charles Tucker’s “Herbert Blumer: A Pilgrimage with Pragmatism.” The other memorial essay was published in the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography by Blumer’s student Jacqueline Wiseman.

Our core reading from Hughes is one of his most famous papers, “Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status” (1945). Two other papers, “The Study of Institutions” (1942) and “Mistakes at Work” (1951), are included as bonus readings. Many of Hughes’ papers are in two collections, Men and their Work (1958) and The Sociological Eye (1971).


The remaining two core readings are early papers by Hughes’ student Becker, “The Professional Dance Musician and His Audience” (1951) and “Becoming a Marihuana User” (1953). Both of these later appeared in Outsiders (1963), which was an early contribution to labeling theory and a constructionist perspective on deviance. Another paper from Outsiders, “Marihuana Use and Social Control” (1955) appears as a bonus reading.


Becker is one of my sociological heroes and we will encounter his work on art worlds during our week on “doing things together.” I have included two interviews with him as bonus readings. In the first of these, conducted by Julius Debro in 1970, Becker talks about his early career. In the second, conducted by Ken Plummer in 2002, Becker dismisses the latest fashions of the discipline. Another Becker-related bonus reading is Clinton Sander’s recent essay “Learning from Experience: Recollection of Working with Howard S. Becker” (2013).

Among the other bonus readings are two articles by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss: "Awareness Contexts and Social Interaction" (1964) and “Temporal Aspects of Dying as a Non-Scheduled Status Passage” (1965). Strauss was another important Chicagoan who developed the idea of negotiated (or processual) order and, with Glaser, created grounded theory. Two other bonus readings are two articles by Charles Horton Cooley: “Social Consciousness” (1907) and “The Roots of
Social Knowledge” (1926). Another is “Reference Groups as Perspectives” by Tamotsu Shibutani, another early interactionist.

Rounding out the bonus readings are three historical analyses. Robert Dingwall’s “Notes Toward an Intellectual History of Symbolic Interactionism” (2001) argues that the SI label describes the type of sociology that was practiced at Chicago from 1900-1940 but later became unfashionable. To the contrary, argues Howard Becker in “The Chicago School, So-Called” (1999), Chicago was a “school of activity,” not a “school of thought.” Finally, Peter Kivisto and William Swatos (1990) explain where Max Weber fits into this picture in “Weber and Interpretive Sociology in America” (1990).
Week 3: Goffman and the Dramaturgical Perspective

Erving Goffman didn’t consider himself a symbolic interactionist, but his work has had a tremendous influence on the perspective and the entire discipline. Although Goffman wrote occasional journal articles, his most influential ideas came from his books, including: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), *Asylums* (1961), *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), and *Frame Analysis* (1974). In addition to developing what has become known as the dramaturgical perspective on social life, Goffman coined a series of widely used terms, including impression management, stigma, total institution, civil inattention, interaction ritual, and identity kit.

I am having you read two excerpts from Goffman’s books, the first chapters of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* ("Performances") and *Stigma* ("Stigma and Social Identity").

A number of Goffman’s articles are included in the course pack as bonus readings. The most significant one is probably his 1982 ASA Presidential Address, “The Interaction Order” (1983). Goffman was unable to give the address himself because of illness, and he died before the article was published.) The others are “Embarrassment and Social Organization” (1956), “The Nature of Deferece and Demeanor” (1956b), “The Neglected Situation” (1964), “Replies and Responses” (1976), “The Arrangement between the Sexes” (1977), “Response Cries” (1978), and “Felicity’s Condition” (1983b). The final article with Goffman’s name attached to it is a transcription of a talk, “On Fieldwork” (1989), he gave at the 1974 Pacific Sociological Association Meetings, which was surreptitiously recorded and published after his death.

The other three core readings are dramaturgical analyses that draw upon Goffman’s concepts. First, Spencer Cahill and five of his undergraduate students analyzed bathroom behavior in “Meanwhile Backstage: Public Bathrooms and the Interaction Order” (1985). Cahill & Robin Eggleston’s “Reconsidering the Stigma of Physical Disability: Wheelchair Use and Public Kindness” (1995), is included as a bonus reading. We will read another article from their wheelchair project during our week on emotions.


The final core reading is by our department’s own Abdi Kusow. His “Contesting Stigma: On Goffman’s Assumptions of Normative Order” (2004) shows how Somali immigrants in Toronto disavow the nature of their color-based stigma and impose their own stigma on mainstream Canadian society.

The course pack also includes several commentaries on Goffman’s influence. The background reading is Charles Edgley’s “The Dramaturgical Genre” (2003) from *The Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*. Also included as bonus readings are John Lofland’s “Erving Goffman’s Sociological Legacies” (1984), William A. Gamson’s “Goffman’s Legacy to Political Sociology” (1985), Candace West’s “Goffman in Feminist Perspective” (1996), and Howard S. Becker’s “The Politics of Presentation: Goffman and Total Institutions” (2003). Three other articles, all related to Goffman and emotions, are an essay by Thomas J. Scheff (“Looking-Glass Self: Goffman as Symbolic Interactionist,” 2005) arguing that Goffman is an symbolic interactionist in the tradition of Charles Cooley, and responses by Phillip Manning (“Reinvigorating the Tradition of Symbolic Interactionism,”
I’ve included a large collection of empirical bonus readings. The first set focuses on impression management and the presentation of self, covering such topics as panhandling (Lankenau 1999a, 1999b), college students receiving exam grades (Albas & Albas 1988), romance readers (Brackett 2000), hospice (Cain 2012), motherhood (Collett 2005), city government (Futrell 1999), Internet home pages (Walker 2000), ex-convicts (Harding 2003), unemployment (Miller 1986), airport checkpoints (Pütz 2012), undercover narcotics agents (Jacobs 1992), and shyness (Scott 2005). Also included is Alex Thompson’s 2012 Blumer Award co-winning paper “‘Sometimes, I Think I Might Say Too Much’: Dark Secrets and the Performance of Inflammatory Bowel Disease” (2013). Finally, I’ve included my two co-authored papers on engagement proposals: “‘Popping the Question’ When the Answer is Known: The Engagement Proposal as Performance” (Schweingruber, Anahita & Berns 2004) and “‘A Story and a Ring’: Audience Judgments about Engagement Proposals” (Schweingruber, Cast & Anahita).

One of Goffman’s most used concepts is stigma. A second set of articles look at stigma toward and stigma management by racists (Berbrier 1999, Hughey 2012, Simi & Futrell 2009), strippers (Bradley 2007; Trautner & Collett 2010), the disabled (Taub, McLorg & Fanflik 2004), drug users (Hathaway 2004), homeless kids (Roschelle & Kaufman 2004), belly dancers (Kraus 2010), female athletes (Blinde & Taub 1992), psychics (Evans, Forsyth & Foreman 2003), people with OCD (Fennell 2007), murderer’s relatives (May 2000), the voluntarily childless (Park 2002), redheads (Heckert & Best 1997), customers at an adult novelty store (Hefley 2007), women with breast implants (Saxena 2013), the mentally ill (Thoits 2011), white middle-class singles (Zajicek & Koski 2003), gays and lesbians (Kaufman & Johnson 2004), and women who “come out as fat” (Saguy & Ward 2011).

Other stigma bonus articles include Bruce Link and Jo Phelan’s Annual Review of Sociology article “Conceptualizing Stigma” (2001); and two articles that reconceptualize stigma using structural symbolic interactionist concepts: James Daniel Lee and Elizabeth Craft’s “Protecting One’s Self from a Stigmatized Disease… Once One Has It,” and Ellen Granberg’s “‘Now My ‘Old Self’ Is Thin’: Stigma Exits after Weight Loss” (2011).

Goffman’s concept of frame analysis is also widely used by sociologists, but most of the frame analysis articles in the course pack are to be found in week #13 (Crowds, Behavior in Public and Social Movements). An exception here is Jonas Linderoth’s use of frame analysis in his study of World of Warcraft, “The Effort of Being in a Fictional World: Upkeyings and Laminated Frames” (2012).

The course pack also contains one reading focusing on Goffman’s concept of total institution: Jill McCorkel’s “Going to the Crackhouse: Critical Space as a Form of Resistance in Total Institutions and Everyday Life” (1998).
Week 4: Structural Symbolic Interactionism (Iowa and Indiana Schools)

Herbert Blumer’s interpretation of Mead and his attempt to police the boundaries of SI have not sat well with many self-designated symbolic interactionists. One early group of dissenters, trained by Manford Kuhn at the University of Iowa, became known as the Iowa School of Symbolic Interactionism. Many commentators still refer to the Chicago and Iowa Schools as the main divisions in SI (e.g., *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*) even though little research is currently being published by those who identify with the Iowa School.

Meanwhile, another group of sociologists publishes regularly in the prestigious *Social Psychology Quarterly*, wins the Cooley-Mead Award on a regular basis, and identifies its ideas as symbolic interactionist, but is largely ignored by those working in the Chicago School tradition. This group is known as the Indiana School of SI since three of its leading scholars, Sheldon Stryker, Peter Burke, and David Heise, are or were faculty members at the University of Indiana. Its members also refer to themselves as structural symbolic interactionists.

Both the Iowa and Indiana Schools differed with Blumer on three major grounds: (1) They viewed social structure as a more important constraint on individuals than Blumer did; (2) they conceptualized the self as a structure as well as a process; and (3) they advocated the use of a wider range of methods, including quantitative ones, than did Blumer.

This week’s core readings include four from the Indiana School and two from the Iowa School. There are also background and bonus reading from each school.

**Indiana School Readings**

The background readings on the Indiana School include two by Sheldon Stryker, founder of school. One is a chapter from Stryker’s 1980 book *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version*, in which he lays out his version of interactionist thought. The other is Styker’s “Whither Symbolic Interaction? Reflections on a Personal Odyssey” (2003), his contribution to the special *Symbolic Interaction* issue by George Herbert Mead Award winners. In it he describes the antagonism toward structural SI, which he believes is dissipating. The response to the article, included as a bonus reading, was written by Burke (2003).

I included three of Styker’s empirical articles in the bonus readings: “Relationships of Married Offspring and Parent: A Test of Mead’s Theory” (1956); “Identity Salience and Psychological Centrality: Equivalent, Overlapping, or Complementary Concepts?” (1994, with Richard Serpe); and “Structural Precursors to Identity Processes: The Role of Proximate Social Structures” (2012, with David Merolla, Serpe & Wesley Schultz). (Stryker’s Cooley-Mead Award Address can be found among the first week bonus readings.) I’ve also included an article by Stryker’s student, Richard Serpe, “Stability and Change in Self: A Structural Symbolic Interactionist Explanation” (1987).

In the first core reading, “The Past, Present, and Future of Identity Theory” (2000), Stryker and Peter Burke discuss the two variants of identity theory they created. Burke, one of the most prolific structural symbolic interactionists, won the Cooley-Mead Award in 2003. His address, “Identities and Social Structure” (2004), is our next core reading. Stryker’s introduction of Burke, included as a bonus reading, gives some background about Burke’s accomplishments.

Identity” (1999, with Teresa Tsushima), and “Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory” (2000, with Jan Stets).

Alicia Cast, one of Burke’s Ph.D. students, is an author of the remaining Indiana School articles. Her solo-authored core reading is “Power and the Ability to Define the Situation” (2003). Alicia was on our faculty before moving to UC-Santa Barbara.

The final Indian School core reading is “Reconstructing the Good Farmer Identity: Shifts in Farmer Identities and Farm Management Practices to Improve Water Quality” by ISU Ph.D student Jean McGuire, ISU faculty member Lois Wright Morton and Cast.

I’ve included five more of Alicia’s articles as bonus readings: her 1999 *SPQ* article with Stets and Burke, “Does the Self Conform to the Views of Others?”; her 2003 *Social Forces* article with Peter Burke, “A Theory of Self-Esteem”; a pair of solo-authored articles from 2004, “Role-Taking and Interaction” and “Well-Being and the Transition to Parenthood: An Identity Theory Approach”; and her 2007 *SPQ* article with Allison Cantwell, “Identity Change in Newly Married Couples: Effects of Positive and Negative Feedback.” Cantwell is a recently graduate from our department, now in graduate school at UC-Riverside.


Yet another structural symbolic interactionist winner of the Cooley-Mead Award is Lyn Smith-Lovin. Her award address, “The Strength of Weak Identities: Social Structural Sources of Self, Situation, and Emotional Experience” (2007), is included as a bonus reading. Dawn Robinson’s introductory address provides some background on Smith-Lovin’s accomplishments. An article co-authored by Robinson and Smith-Lovin, “Selective Interaction as a Strategy for Identity Maintenance: An Affect Control Model” (1992), is included as a bonus reading.

The bonus readings also include a pair by Michael Carter on moral identities: “The Moral Self: Applying Identity Theory” (2011, with Jan Stets) and “Advancing Identity Theory: Examining the Relationship between Activated Identities and Behavior in Different Social Contexts” (forthcoming).

Iowa School Readings

Some may argue that the Iowa School of Symbolic Interactionism has been a dead end, but it’s my dead end. My academic lineage (the succession of Ph.D. dissertation advisors) connects me to Manford Kuhn (and, further back, to William James). My advisor, Clark McPhail, was a student of Robert Stewart, who was a student of Kuhn.

The background reading about the Iowa School is Michael Katovich, Dan Miller and Robert Stewart’s chapter in the Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism (2003).

Kuhn is most famous for the “Twenty Statements Test,” a paper & pencil instrument that asked people to give 20 answers to the question “Who Am I?” This is described in the first Iowa School core article, Kuhn and Thomas McPartland’s “An Empirical Investigation of Self-Attitudes” (1954). A follow-up article is his “Self-Attitudes by Age, Sex and Professional Training” (1960).

Some of the problems with the method are described in McPhail and Charles Tucker’s “The Classification and Ordering of Responses to the Question ‘Who am I?’” (1972). (We will encounter McPhail again during our week on Crowds, Behavior in Public and Social Movements, and his exchange in ASR with Blumer over the meaning of Mead is included in the Great Debates section of the course pack.)

Kuhn, the founder of the Iowa School, laid out his overview of SI in “Major Trends in Symbolic Interaction Theory in the Past Twenty-Five Years” (1964), his Midwest Sociological Society presidential address. I’ve included two more Kuhn essays as bonus readings: “The Reference Group Reconsidered” (1964b) and “Kinsey’s View on Human Behavior” (1954), his insightful review of Sexual Behavior in the Human Female.

One of Kuhn’s students, Carl Couch, founded the “New Iowa School of Symbolic Interactionism,” which pioneered laboratory experiments in social interaction (in the basement of Seashore Hall in Iowa City). The most famous of these was the “openings” experiment, reported in our final core reading, “The Elements and Structures of Openings,” by Dan Miller, Robert Hintz and Couch.

A retrospective assessment of the experiment by two of its authors can be found in Hintz and Miller’s “Openings Revisited: The Foundations of Social Interaction” (1995).


The final Iowa School bonus reading is Robert Stewart’s “What George Mead Should Have Said: Explorations of a Problem of Interpretation.”
**Week 5: Self and Identity**

For Blumer, what was distinctive about Mead’s approach to social life was his insistence that people had selves. The self has continued to be important to interactionists although there has not been agreement about how to conceptualize the self or how self relates to identity. Two major images are self as process (e.g., conversation between “I” and “me”) and self as object (since the self is object to itself). Structural symbolic interactionist have also viewed the self as structure and as product of social structure. For Goffman, the self was a character, a dramatic effect that may or may not be credited by its audience. Recently, some symbolic interactionists have attempted to understand the self as narratives situated in institutions.

Identities are usually seen as components of selves that are situated in interaction (the Chicago School emphasis) and/or social structure (the structural SI emphasis).

What these various images have in common is that the self (and its constituent identities) are like other social objects, i.e., they have no inherent meaning but are given meaning through social interaction and modified through interpretation. All six core readings involve people’s attempts to give meaning to selves/identities (their own or others) in the face of obstacles in their social environment. Note the language in the articles’ titles: selves are “constructed,” “produced,” “worked on” and “avowed,” but they are also “aggrandized,” “constricted,” and “contested.”

The first pair of core articles use the concept of “identity work,” which was developed in David Snow and Leon Anderson’s “Identity Work among the Homeless: The Verbal Construction and Avowal of Personal Identities” (1987), which examines how homeless street people create identities through “identity work,” or more specifically, “identity talk.” This AJS article came out of the same study that produced their book *Down on their Luck*, the 1993 Cooley Award winner.

In “Confronting Deadly Disease: The Drama of Identity Construction Among Gay Men with AIDS” (1990), Kent Sandstrom describes the identity work of building an “AIDS identity” in the face of a number of interpersonal dilemmas resulting from being a person with AIDS. The article won the 1989 Blumer Award.

The second pair of core articles focus the possibility of one identity dominating the self. Patti and Peter Adler’s “The Gloried Self: The Aggrandizement and the Constriction of Self” (1989) describes the creation of the “gloried selves” of the college basketball players, which were unintended by the athletes themselves. The Adlers’ basketball ethnography also resulted in the book *Backboards and Blackboards* (1991).

In “Self-Structure, Identity, and Commitment: Promise Keepers’ Godly Man Project” (2002), Michael Armato and William Marsiglio also look at one master identity engulfing others, but in this case (unlike the Adlers’) the creation of the master identity was the goal of the Promise Keepers they studied.

The final pair of articles looks at the production of “institutional selves” through narratives produced by organizations. In “Producing Institutional Selves: Rhetorically Constructing the Dignity of Sexually Marginalized Catholics” (2001), Donileen Loseke and James Cavendish examine the creation of the “dignified self” by Dignity, a pro-gay Catholic organization. In the final core reading, “Contested Selves in Divorce Proceedings” (2001), Joseph Hopper describes how attorneys attempt to construct a “legal self” for their clients, who instead desire a “moral self.”

Doni Loseke’s important theoretical article on “The Study of Identity as Cultural, Institutional, Organizational, and Personal Narratives” (2007) is included as a bonus reading and is a good introduction to the interconnected ideas of “narrative selves,” “institutional selves,” and “cultural
narratives” (or “formula stories”). In brief, people’s tell stories about themselves (“personal narratives”) that draw upon stories that exist in the larger culture (“formula stories”) and narratives institutionalized at institutional and organizational levels. These cultural, institutional and organizational narratives also constrain people’s storytelling about themselves.

The concepts of self and identity are discussed in the other two background readings, chapters in *The Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism* (2003) by Andrew Weigert and Viktor Gecas (“Self”) and Kevin Vryan, Patricia Adler and Peter Adler (“Identity”).

The bonus readings include additional articles by the authors of the core articles. Two other articles from the Adlers’ basketball ethnography are “Intense Loyalty in Organizations: A Case of College Athletics” (1988) and “From Idealism to Pragmatic Detachment: The Academic Performance of College Athletes” (1985). Another piece by the Adlers, “Transience and the Postmodern Self: The Geographic Mobility of Resort Workers” (1999), is from their ethnography of Hawaiian resort works.

I’ve also included two more articles from Hopper’s study of divorce, “The Rhetoric of Motives in Divorce” (1993) and “The Symbolic Origins of Conflict in Divorce” (2001); Anderson’s article on “Standing Out while Fitting In: Serious Leisure Identities and Aligning Actions among Skydivers and Gun Collectors” (2010, with Jimmy Taylor); and Sandstrom’s article on “Redefining Sex and Intimacy: The Sexual Self-Images, Outlooks, and Relationships of Gay Men Living with HIV/AIDS” (1996).

Several of the bonus readings take a narrative/institutional self approach, which was pioneered by Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein. An overview can be found in their book *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World* (2000). Three of their key articles are “Grounding the Postmodern Self” (1994), “Individual Agency, the Ordinary, and Postmodern Life” (1995), and “Narrative Practice and the Coherence of Personal Stories” (1998). A number of pieces using this approach can be found in their collection *Institutional Selves: Troubled Selves in a Postmodern World* (2001), including Hopper’s core reading, Susan Chase’s “Universities as Discursive Environments for Sexual Identity Construction,” and Kathleen Lowney and Holstein’s “Victims, Villains, and Talk Show Selves.” We will read another chapter from the book, by Loseke, during our week on social problems.


Other bonus articles examine self processes among homeless pet owners (Irvine, Kahl & Smith 2012), Christian belly dancers (Kraus 2010b), contingent workers (Padavic 2005), Muslim college students (Peek 2005), vacationers (Stein 2011), high school reunion attendees (Vinitzky-Seroussi & Robert Zussman 1996), fantasy role players (Waskul & Lust 2004), sorority members (Hunt & Miller 1997), and relatives of murdered children (Martin 2010).

The bonus readings also include essays by Lonnie Athens on “The Self as Soliloquy” (1994) and “Dramatic Self Change” (1995), and by Nobert Wiley on “The Self as Self-Fulfilling Prophecy” (2003).

The final bonus reading is Helena Znaniecki Lopata’s “Self-Identity in Marriage and Widowhood” (1973). In addition to being a noted sociologist and early interactionist herself, Lopata was the daughter of Florian Znaniecki, co-author with W.I. Thomas, of the five-volume The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, 1918-1920, which is a foundational work for American sociology. Znaniecki is also the University of Illinois’ most famous sociology faculty member, and I was fortunate to meet Lopata when she visited Illinois’ sociology department in the late 1990s. She died in 2003 at the age of 77.
Week 6: Emotions

This week’s core readings all connect to the dominant symbolic interactionist approach to emotions, which, borrowing from the dramaturgical perspective, views emotions as an aspect of performance that people attempt to manage. The terms “emotion work,” “emotion management,” and “emotional labor” are all used to describe this process. (Although some distinguish between these terms, their usage is not consistent.)

The principal developer of the emotion management approach is Arlie Russell Hochschild, who studied the emotion work of flight attendants and bill collectors for her book The Managed Heart (1983). Our first core reading is her seminal AJS article “Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure” (1979). The other core readings draw upon Hochschild’s insights, but also extend them in interesting directions.

One of Hochschild’s claims is that organizations may demand emotion work from their employees. The core reading that builds on this insight is Allen Smith and Sherryl Kleinman’s examination of medical student’s emotional socialization in “Managing Emotions in Medical School: Students’ Contact with the Living and the Dead” (1989). They argue that the emotion work medical student engage in results in the reproduction of the perspective of modern Western medicine. Two other articles co-authored by Kleinman are bonus readings: Barbara Stenross and Kleinman’s “The Highs and Lows of Emotional Labor: Detectives’ Encounters with Criminals and Victims” (1989) and Trudy Mills and Kleinman’s “Emotions, Reflexivity, and Action: An Interactionist Analysis” (1988).

Michelle Wolkomir conducted her dissertation research on men in support groups wrestling with the contradiction between being a Christian and being a gay man. One group, Accept, helped men to reconcile these identities. The other, Expell, helped the men to become ex-gays. The study resulted in her book, Be Not Deceived (2006). Our core reading from her study is “Emotion Work, Commitment, and the Authentification of the Self: The Case of Gay and Ex-Gay Christian Support Groups” (2001). Wolkomir suggests that emotion work may be important for understanding social movement recruiting. Two other articles from her study are included as bonus reading for our upcoming week on gender.

The third core reading on emotion work is Cahill and Robin Eggleston’s “Managing Emotions in Public: The Case of Wheelchair Users” (1994). They bring attention to the interpersonal aspect of emotion management. A companion article on stigma was a bonus reading during our week on the dramaturgical perspective. Cahill’s article on the emotional socialization of mortuary students is a core reading during our upcoming week on socialization.

Amy Wilkins’ “Happier than Non-Christians’: Collective Emotions and Symbolic Boundaries among Evangelical Christians” (2008) looks at emotion work in an evangelical Christian organization and shows how being happy isn’t just a feeling rule, but also an important element of the group’s culture. We will read Wilkins’ article on emotional restraint among black university men during our upcoming week on inequality (and another Wilkins’ article during our week on gender).

Finally, Nancy Berns’ takes a social problems approach in her research on “closure,” examining the creation of a new emotion and showing how the closure narrative becomes a culture resource and creates a new set of feeling rules. In her Cooley Award-winning books Closure: The Rush to End Grief and What It Costs Us (2011), she looks at the use of closure in a variety of institutions. Her article “Contesting the Victim Card: Closure Discourse and Emotion in Death Penalty Rhetoric” (2009) examines its use by proponents and opponents of the death penalty.
A bonus article by Berns, “Shaping the Selves of Young Salespeople through Emotion Management” (2005, with David Schweingruber), examines how emotion management can be used to create selves. We build on Spencer Cahill’s concept of “emotional capital” (which we will read about during our week on socialization) to describe how company managers engage in “emotion mining” to locate untapped emotional capital and transform the selves of their salespersons.

A number of bonus readings focus on emotion management in the workplace. One of my favorites is Arnold Arluke’s “Managing Emotions in an Animal Shelter” (1994), which shows how our societal contradictions about the treatment of animals result in shelter workers having to engage in emotion management. Other articles on workplace emotion management focus on bill collectors (Sutton 1991), law firms (Lively 2000), service workers (Godwyn 2006), the criminal justice system (Goodrum & Stafford 2003), actors (Orzechowicz 2008), victim-advocates (Kolb 2011), veterinarians (Morris 2012), professional wrestling (Smith 2008), mixed martial arts (Vaccaro, Schrock & McCabe 2011), and social service workers (Copp 1998).

Three articles by Jennifer Lois are included as bonus readings. Two are from her study of a search and rescue group (which we read about during our week on socialization): “Peaks and Valleys: The Gendered Emotional Culture of Edgework” (2001) and “Managing Emotions, Intimacy, and Relationships in a Volunteer Search and Rescue Group” (2001). The other is from her study on homeschooling: “Role Strain, Emotion Management, and Burnout: Homeschooling Mothers’ Adjustment to the Teacher Role” (2006).


Amanda Gengler won the 2013 Mead Award for her unpublished paper, “‘Keep Your Hope, Keep Your Faith’: Hope Work and Emotional Threat Management among Families of Seriously Ill Children” (2013), which is included as a bonus reading.

Also included as bonus readings are another influential SI article on emotion, Susan Shott’s “Emotion and Social Life: A Symbolic Interactionist Analysis” (1979), which appeared in AJS shortly before Hochschild’s did, as well as two essays on emotion by Norm Denzin: “A Note on Emotionality, Self, and Interaction” (1983) and “Emotion and Lived Experience” (1985).

Other bonus readings focus on women’s prisons (Greer 2002), celibate Christians (Creek 2013), abortion regret (Kimport 2012), edgework (Ling 1990), celebrities (Harris & Ferris 2009), grief (Lofland 1985), and college football (Zurcher 1982). Finally, David Franks’s chapter on “Emotions” (2003) from the Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism overviews some of the SI research on emotions.
**Week 7: Doing Things Together**

In his 1986 collection *Doing Things Together*, Howard S. Becker writes that:

Louis Wirth used to tell my cohort of graduate students at the University of Chicago that sociology studied what was true by virtue of the fact that people everywhere lived in groups. That definition seemed trivial and still would, if its implications were not so persistently ignored. We soon learned that it was not trivial because, taken seriously, it meant that you could not take seriously a lot of other commonly accepted ideas. Seeing things as the product of people doing things together makes a lot of other views less plausible and less interesting.

“Doing things together” describes the symbolic interactionist way of thinking about social organization as people fitting their lines of action together because of their ability to take each other’s perspectives within shared systems of meaning. Both background readings, Herbert Blumer’s “Society as Symbolic Interaction” (1969) and Becker’s “Culture: A Sociological View” (1982), lay out a version of this argument.

My favorite sociological book and the inspiration for my thinking about social organization is Becker’s *Art Worlds* (1982), in which he shows how art is a group production made possible by conventions that facilitate some forms of collective action while making others more difficult. The first chapter is based on our first core reading “Art as Collective Action” (1974).

Three Becker bonus readings are related to *Art Worlds*. “Art Worlds and Social Types” (1976) and “Arts and Crafts” (1978) are two other articles that were incorporated into the book. “Art Worlds’ Revisited” (1990) is a reflection on the book and how it came to be.


The second core reading is by one of Becker’s most prominent students, the renowned urban ethnographer Elijah Anderson. **The Cosmopolitan Canopy** (2004), from the book of the same name, discusses spaces in Philadelphia that offer respite from the caution and suspiciousness that characterize much of city life—and are a theme in Anderson’s earlier work.

Anderson’s dissertation research resulted in the classic Chicago ethnography *A Place on the Corner* (2nd ed., 2003), which Anderson reflects on in “Jelly’s Place: An Ethnographic Memoir” (2003).

Anderson’s next two books, *Streetwise: Race, Class and Change in an Urban Community* (1991) and *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (2000), are based on his ethnographic research in Philadelphia. Two articles from this research, “Sex Codes and Family Life among Poor Inner-City Youths” (1989) and “The Emerging Philadelphia African American Structure” (2000), are included as bonus readings. We’ll read another during our week on deviance.

The most recent Anderson bonus readings are an article on “The Iconic Ghetto” (2012) and a report from an “exploratory ethnography” with three other ethnographers that emerged from the cosmopolitan canopy research: “The Legacy of Racial Caste: An Exploratory Ethnography” (2012, with Duke Austin, Craig Laprice Holloway & Vani Kulkarni).

Gary Alan Fine is one of the most prolific interactionists. Topics of his research have included urban legends, Little League baseball, historical reputations, mushroom hunters, and meteorology stations. The article I’ve selected as his core reading, **The Culture of Production: Aesthetic Choices**
and Constraints in Culinary Work” (1992), is from his study of restaurants, which resulted in the book Kitchens (1996).

The Fine bonus readings include two others related to his kitchen research: “Organizational Time: Temporal Demands and the Experience of Work in Restaurant Kitchens” (1990) and “The Presentation of Ethnic Authenticity: Chinese Food as Social Accomplishment” (1995, with Shun Lu). (Fine’s article on learning to cook is included as a socialization bonus reading.) Two other bonus readings concern Fine’s recent research on meteorology: “Shopfloor Cultures: The Ideoculture of Production in Operational Meteorology” (2006) and “Ground Truth: Verification Games in Operational Meteorology” (2006). The final empirical articles are one from his Little League research, “Small Groups and Culture Creation: The Idioculture of Little League Baseball” (1979), and another on “Secrecy, Trust, and Dangerous Leisure: Generating Group Cohesion in Voluntary Organizations” (1996, with Lori Holyfield).


The final Fine-related bonus reading is Roberta Sassatelli’s “A Serial Ethnographer: An Interview with Gary Alan Fine” (2009).

Stefan Timmermans is the world’s premier medical ethnographer. Our fourth core reading, “Suicide Determination and the Professional Authority of Medical Examiners” (2005), is based on the three years of observing medical examiners perform autopsies that resulted in his book Postmortem (2006). One of his bonus articles, “The Cause of Death vs. the Gift of Life: Boundary Maintenance and the Politics of Expertise in Death Investigations” (2002), is also from this research project.

Two others, “When Death Isn’t Dead: Implicit Social Rationing during Resuscitative Efforts” (1999) and “Saving Lives or Saving Multiple Identities?: The Double Dynamic of Resuscitation Scripts” (1996), are from his dissertation research on CPR, which resulted in the book Sudden Death and the Myth of CPR (1999).

Stefan’s latest book (with Mara Buchbinder), Saving Babies?: The Consequences of Newborn Genetic Screening (2012), is based on a three-year ethnographic study of newborn genetic screening. Two bonus readings from that study are their articles “Patients-in-Waiting: Living between Sickness and Health in the Genomics Era” (2010) and “Newborn Screening and Maternal Diagnosis: Rethinking Family Benefit” (2011).

The fifth core reading is my own “Success Through a Positive Mental Attitude? The Role of Positive Thinking in Door-to-Door Sales” (2006). This article is derived from my dissertation research, which uses a Becker-inspired approach to understanding the social organization of door-to-door salespersons. Another article from my door-to-door sales research, “Doing Money Work in a Door-to-Door Sales Organization” (2001, with Nancy Berns), is included as a bonus reading. Another piece from the project was a bonus reading during emotion week.

A major strand of SI thinking about social organization is derived from Anselm Strauss’ book Negotiations (1978). Originally called “negotiated order,” this perspective now goes by the name “processual order” and is associated with the concept of “social world.” The basic idea is that “as actors with varying interests, ideologies, or commitments confront problematic situations, they continuously engage in interaction strategies such as negotiation, cooperation, manipulation, the formation of coalitions, or coercion in order to forge solutions that further their individual and
collective interests. The outcomes of these processes become sedimented into social orders (especially informal norms, routines, or definitions of situations), but these orders themselves are created, maintained, and changed over time by action processes such as those listed above. Furthermore, this processual ordering is embedded in larger sets of contextual conditions that both constrain and enable the participants' interaction” (Ulmer 1998, p. 251). In other words, people create social organization through their interactions (e.g., negotiations) and this social organization serves as the environment for future interactions, which may in turn alter this organization.


I’ve also included a number of bonus readings that use a negotiated order/social worlds approach. Four of these are from a 1982 special issue of *Urban Life* on negotiated order: Lawrence Busch’s “History, Negotiation, and Structure in Agricultural Research,” Peter Hall and Dee Ann Spencer-Hall’s “The Social Conditions of the Negotiated Order,” David Maines’s “In Search of Mesostructure: Studies in the Negotiated Order,” and Anselm Strauss’s “Interorganizational Negotiation.”


Also among the other bonus readings are three famous ASR articles on aligning actions: Marvin Scott and Stanford Lyman’s “Accounts” (1968), John Hewitt and Randall Stokes’ “Disclaimers” (1975), and Stokes and Hewitt’s “Aligning Actions” (1976).

Another bonus article is David Owen Gardner’s 2003 Blumer Award winning paper, “The Portable Community Life: Mobility and Modernization in Bluegrass Festival Life” (2004).

Finally, bonus readings are a collection of interesting articles about people doing things together: two articles by Margarethe Kusenbach on neighborhoods, “Patterns of Neighboring: Practing Community in the Parochial Realm” (1996) and “A Hierarchy of Urban Communities: Observations on the Nested Character of Place” (2008); two articles by Antony Puddephatt on chess, “Chess Playing
Week 8: Socialization

Howard S. Becker, in his seminal article on “Becoming a Marihuana User” (1953), claims that:

[T]he presence of a given kind of behavior is the result of a sequence of social experiences during which the person acquires a conception of the meaning of the behavior, and perceptions and judgments of objects and situations, all of which make the activity possible and desirable. Thus, the motivation or disposition to engage in the activity is built up in the course of learning to engage in it and does not antedate this learning process. For such a view it is not necessary to identify those “traits” which “cause” the behavior. Instead, the problem becomes one of describing the set of changes in the person’s conception of the activity and of the experience it provides for him.

The articles for this week apply this interactionist understanding of socialization as the learning of shared understandings that make social action possible.

The first three core articles examine socialization among children and adolescents. In their article, “Socialization to Gender Roles: Popularity among Elementary School Boys and Girls” (1992) Patti Adler, Steven Kless, and Peter Adler show how elementary school children socialize each other to act as boys and girls are supposed to act. The article is from the Adlers’ project that resulted in their book Peer Power: Preadolescent Culture and Identity (1998). I’ve included two bonus readings from this project: “The Carpool: A Socializing Adjunct to the Educational Experience” (1984) and “Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Preadolescent Cliques” (1995).

Arnold Arluke is the leading interactionist researcher on human-animal interactions. His article “Animal Abuse as Dirty Play” (2002) examines abuse of animals by adolescents as a way of appropriating adult culture. This article from Symbolic Interaction was followed by a commentary by Spencer Cahill, “Beastly Bodies in Human Hands, Heads, and Hearts: Reflections on Animal Abuse as Dirty Play,” which is included as a bonus reading. Also included is “Learning the Scientist’s Role: Animal Dissection in Middle School” (1997) by Dorian Solot and Arluke. Arluke’s research on animal cruelty is collected in his book Just a Dog: Understanding Animal Cruelty and Ourselves (2006).

The final core article on adolescent socialization is Gary Alan Fine’s “Games and Truths: Learning to Construct Social Problems in High School Debate” (2000), which is based on his study of high school debate teams described in the book Gifted Tongues: High School Debate and Adolescent Culture (2001). In addition to providing an interesting look at socialization into an adolescent subculture, the article also introduces the social constructionist approach to social problems, which we will later examine in detail. Two Fine articles are included as bonus reading: another article from this project, “Adolescence as Cultural Toolkit: High School Debate and the Repertoires of Childhood and Adulthood” (2004), and an article from his restaurant research, “Occupational Aesthetics: How Trade School Students Learn to Cook” (1985).


Interactionist research on socialization has not been limited to childhood, as Becker’s marihuana article demonstrates. Early interactionist research by Everett Hughes, Becker and other
Hughes students examined professional socialization. A more recent article in this tradition is Spencer Cahill’s “Emotional Capital and Professional Socialization: The Case of Mortuary Science Students (and Me)” (1999), which focuses on emotional socialization. Another article from the same project, “The Boundaries of Professionalism: The Case of North American Funeral Direction” (1999), is a bonus reading.

Cahill’s early research focused on childhood socialization. Three articles from this research are included as bonus readings: “Self Definition: The Case of Gender Identity Acquisition” (1986), “Children and Civility: Ceremonial Deviance and the Acquisition of Ritual Competence” (1987), and “Fashioning Males and Females: Appearance Management and the Social Reproduction of Gender” (1989).

The final core reading, Jennifer Lois’ “Socialization to Heroism: Individual and Collectivism in a Voluntary Search and Rescue Group” (1999), is based on her participant observation in a search and rescue group working in a mountainous Colorado county. Her research resulted in the book Heroic Efforts (2003) and two additional journal articles, which are included as bonus readings for our week on emotions.

Another interactionist who began his career examining childhood socialization is Norman Denzin. Two of his key articles, “The Genesis of Self in Early Childhood” (1972) and “Play, Games and Interaction: The Contexts of Childhood Socialization” (1975), are included as bonus readings.

Three other articles round out the bonus readings: Allison Hicks’ “Role Fusion: The Occupational Socialization of Prison Chaplains” (2008), Ralph LaRossa and Cynthia Sinha’s “Constructing the Transition to Parenthood” (2006), and Adie Nelson’s “The Things That Dreams Are Made On: Dreamwork and the Socialization of ‘Stage Mothers’” (2001).
Week 9: Inequality

One regular criticism of symbolic interactionism is its supposed inability to adequately deal with inequality and a related constellation of key sociological concepts—social structure, social stratification, power and so on. While many interactionists would dispute this claim, it does seem to be the case that interactionists’ contributions to these areas have not been widely recognized. Or, as Scott Harris puts it: “interactionists have not fully displayed the unique and significant contributions they can make to the study of inequality” (Harris 2001, p. 458). Over the next two weeks, we’ll be reading recent interactionist studies of inequality. Although this week’s topic is inequality and next week’s is gender, many of the articles for both weeks take an intersectional approach.

The first two core articles make the case that interactionism can contribute to understanding inequality. Schwalbe, Godwin, Holden, Schrock, Thompson & Wolkomir’s “Generic Processes in the Reproduction of Inequality: An Interactionist Analysis” (2000) is an attempt to discover the titular “generic processes” through a qualitative meta-analysis of qualitative research on inequality. Other articles by Schwalbe and Wolkomir are among next week’s bonus readings.


Edward Morris, whose ethnographic research in an urban Texas middle school resulted in the book Learning the Hard Way: Masculinity, Place, and the Gender Gap (2012), is the author of our third core reading “‘Tuck in that Shirt!’ Race, Class, Gender, and Discipline in an Urban School” (2005). Two other articles from this project, “From ‘Middle Class’ to ‘Trailer Trash’: Teachers’ Perceptions of White Students in a Predominately Minority School” (2005b) and “‘Ladies’ or ‘Loudies’?: Perceptions and Experiences of Black Girls in Classrooms” (2007b), are included as bonus readings. Another two Morris bonus readings come from his research in a rural school: “‘Rednecks,’ ‘Rutters,’ and ‘Rithmetic: Social Class, Masculinity, and Schooling in a Rural Context” (2008) and “Repelling the ‘Rutter’: Social Differentiation among Rural Teenagers” (2012). A final Morris bonus reading is his methodological reflection “Reseaching Race: Identifying a Social Construction through Qualitative Methods and an Interpretive Perspective” (2007).

The next core reading is from Amy Wilkins, whose research on happiness among evangelical Christians we read during our week on emotions. This week’s core article by Wilkins is “‘Not Out to Start a Revolution’: Race, Gender, and Emotional Restraint among Black University Men” (2012). Two other articles by Wilkins on black college students, “Becoming Black Women: Intimate Stories and Intersectional Identities” (2012b) and “Stigma and Status: Interracial Intimacy and Intersectional Identities among Black College Men” (2012c), are included as bonus readings. We’ll read our final Wilkins core reading next week.


Another bonus reading that looks back to Mead, Blumer and the Chicago School is Ruth Horowitz’s “Inequalities, Democracy, and Fieldwork in the Chicago Schools of Yesterday and Today” (2001).

The bonus readings include a pair of articles that describe interactionist theoretical approaches to inequality: Leon Anderson and David Snow’s “Inequality and the Self: Exploring Connections from an Interactionist Perspective” (2001) and Michael Sauder’s “Symbols and Contexts: An Interactionist Approach to the Study of Social Status” (2005).


Another bonus reading is Alice Fothergill’s Blumer Award-winning paper “The Stigma of Charity: Gender, Class, and Disaster Assistance” (2003).


Week 10: Gender

Symbolic interactionism is potentially an excellent perspective for making sense of how gender is socially constructed, how people develop and enact gendered identities, and how gender is maintained and resisted in everyday interaction. Like much of the discipline, SI has failed to live up to that promise until quite recently. Hopefully, the articles collected for this week, most from the past 10 years, point toward a stronger interactionist future in the field of gender.

The first two core articles focus on gender in the workplace. The first is Christine Williams’s “Shopping as Symbolic Interaction: Race, Class, and Gender in the Toy Store” (2006). Her ethonographic research in a pair of toy stores resulted in the book Inside Toyland (2006) as well as the bonus reading “Inequality in the Toy Store” (2004).


The second workplace article is “‘There Oughtta Be a Law Against Bitches’: Masculinity Lessons in Police Academy Training” (2002) based on field work at a police academy by our own Ana Prokos (who co-authored with her major professor, Irene Padavic). Padavic is also the article of the 1991 Symbolic Interaction article “The Re-Creation of Gender in a Male Workplace,” which is included as a bonus reading.

The remaining four core readings make a connection between gender and sex(uality). Symbolic interactionists have been advancing the argument that human sexuality is socially constructed for over half a century and have used this insight to conduct some excellent research. An early formulation of the interactionist view of sex comes from Manford Kuhn’s 1954 review essay “Kinsey’s View of Human Behavior,” which was a bonus reading during week 4:

A symbolic interactionist view of sex would go something like this: Sex acts, sexual objects, sexual partners (human or otherwise) like other objects toward which human beings behave are social objects; that is they have meanings because meanings are assigned to them by the groups of which human beings are members, for there is nothing in the physiology of [humans] which gives any dependable clue as to what pattern of activity will be followed toward them.

Two of this week’s bonus readings provide good background information on interactionism’s research on sex: Chad Heap’s fascinating bonus reading “The City as a Sexual Laboratory: The Queer
Heritage of the Chicago School” (2003), which includes information on the W.I. Thomas sex scandal; and Ken Plummer’s “Queers, Bodies and Postmodern Sexualities: A Note on Revisiting the ‘Sexual’ in Symbolic Interactionism” (2003). Another bonus reading by Plummer is “Generational Sexualities, Subterranean Traditions, and the Hauntings of the Sexual World: Some Preliminary Remarks” (2010).

Our first core reading connected to sex is Laura Carpenter’s “Gender and the Meaning and Experience of Virginity Loss in the Contemporary United States” (2002), which came out of Carpenter’s dissertation research interviewing people about their virginity “loss.” This research also produced the book Virginity Lost (2005) and the bonus readings “The Ambiguity of ‘Having Sex’: The Subjective Experience of Virginity Loss in the United States” (2001). Further research on the topic resulted in the bonus reading “Like a Virgin… Again?: Secondary Virginity as an Ongoing Gendered Social Construction” (2001).

The next core reading is “Women and Their Clitoris: Personal Discovery, Signification, and Use” (2007) by Dennis Waskul, Philip Vannini and Desiree Wiesen. The researchers used anonymous notebooks to study the meanings women give their clitorises. Some of Waskul’s other research on sex can be found among the bonus readings for week 5.


The background reading is Mary White Stewart’s chapter on “Gender” (2003) from the Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism.

I’ll begin rounding up the many excellent bonus articles in the course pack with articles connected to two very successful concepts with roots in interactionism. The first of these is “doing gender,” which was introduced in Candace West and Don Zimmerman’s “Doing Gender” (1987) and further developed in West & Fenstermaker’s “Doing Difference” (1995) and West & Zimmerman’s “Accounting for Doing Gender” (2009).

The other is the concept of “sexual scripts,” which was developed by two SI fellow travelers, William Simon and John Gagnon. A pair of Chicago School sociologists who were hired by the Kinsey Institute, they co-authored the influential book Sexual Conduct (1973). Gagnon later was involved in the National Health and Social Life Survey, which resulted in the books The Social Organization of Sexuality (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael & Michaels 1994) and Sex in America (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann and Kolata 1995). Both books have a distinctive social constructionist perspective, which is unusual for a report based on survey research. I’ve included three overviews/retrospectives of William and Gagnon’s work: Gagnon’s “The Explicit and Implicit Use of the Scripting Perspective in Sex Research” (1991), Simon and Gagnon’s “Sexual Scripts: Origins, Influences and Changes” (2003) and “John H. Gagnon and William Simon’s Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sex. A 25th Anniversary Retrospective by the Authors” (1999).
Another bonus article of note is by Iowa State faculty member Sharon Bird. Sharon doesn’t self-identify as an interactionist, but her paper “Welcome to the Men’s Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity” (1996) seems congruent with the perspective.

A number of interactionists have multiple articles among the bonus readings. Beth Montemurro published two articles from her study of wedding showers: “‘You Go ‘Cause You Have to’: The Bridal Shower as a Ritual of Obligation” (2002) and “Add Men, Don’t Stir: Reproducing Traditional Gender Roles in Modern Wedding Showers” (2005). A more recent article by Montemurro is “Getting Married, Breaking Up, and Making Up for Lost Time: Relationship Transitions as Turning Points in Women’s Sexuality” (forthcoming).

We encountered Michelle Wolkomir during our week on emotions when we read about her study gay and ex-gay Christian support groups and during our week on inequality, when we read her collaboration with Schwalbe et al. on generic processes in the reproduction of inequality. This week’s bonus readings by Wolkomir include two more from her study of gay/ex-gay support groups, “Wrestling with the Angels of Meaning: The Revisionist Ideological Work of Gay and Ex-Gay Christian Men” (2001) and “Giving It Up To God’: Negotiating Femininity in Support Groups for Wives of Ex-Gay Christian Men” (2004); her article “‘You Fold Like a Little Girl’: (Hetero)Gender Framing and Competitive Strategies of Men and Women in No Limit Texas Hold Em Poker Games” (2012); and her collaboration with Michael Schwalbe, “The Masculine Self as Problem and Resource in Interview Studies of Men” (2001). Schwalbe, who was Wolkomir’s major professor, also published an important article titled “Male Supremacy and the Narrowing of the Moral Self” (1992).


Sinikka Elliott’s contributions to the bonus readings are: “Parents’ Constructions of Teen Sexuality: Sex Panics, Contradictory Discourses and Social Inequality” (2010); “The Performance of Desire: Gender and Sexual Negotiation in Long-Term Marriages” (2008, with Debra Umberson); and “‘We Want Them to Be as Heterosexual as Possible’: Fathers Talk about Their Teen Children’s Sexuality” (2011, with Nicholas Solebello).

Emily Kane has published two articles from her research on how parents think about the gender of their children: “‘No Way My Boys Are Going to Be Like That!’: Parents’ Responses to Children’s Gender Nonconformity” (2006) and “‘I Wanted a Soul Mate’: Gendered Anticipation and Frameworks of Accountability in Parents’ Preferences for Sons and Daughters” (2009).

The final multiple-article author is Mindy Stombler, who has published two articles on fraternity “little sister” programs: “‘Buddies’ or ‘Slutties’: The Collective Sexual Reputation of Fraternity Little Sisters” (1994) and “Sister Acts: Resisting Men’s Domination in Black and White Fraternity Little Sister Programs” (1997, with Irene Padavic).


Finally Mary White Stewart’s chapter on “Gender” (2003) from the Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism overviews some SI research on gender.
Week 11: Deviance, Violence and Social Control

What is the relationship between symbolic interactionism and the study of crime and deviance. According to Jeffery Ulmer in his article, “Demarginalizing Symbolic Interactionism” (2003) (a bonus reading from week 1), SI “permeates” criminology:

As any good criminology textbook can show, the seven major criminological theories are strain theory, social disorganization theory, differential association theory, opportunity theory, social control theory, labeling theory, and, more recently, self control theory and routine activities theory. Of these seven, five are either directly influenced by symbolic interactionism or share common roots and key pragmatist assumptions: social disorganization, differential association, social control, opportunity, and labeling.... This is no accident, since symbolic interactionism and the sociological study of crime have common roots in the classic Chicago school.

On the other hand, much of criminology, with its focus on why people become criminals, appears to ignore SI’s key insights. In his interview with Julius Debro (1970) (included as a bonus reading for week 2), Howard S. Becker claims that his SI approach to deviance (labeling theory) represents “complete continuity with the rest of sociology.”

[However, criminologists] accepted the commonsense notion that there must be something wrong with criminals, otherwise they wouldn’t act that way. They asked “Why do people go into crime? Why don’t they stop? How can we stop them?” The study of crime lost its connection with the mainstream of sociological development and became a very bizarre deformation of sociology, designed to find out why people were doing bad things instead of finding out the organization of interaction in that sphere of life. I had approached the problem differently, the way I’d learned to do in studying occupations.... So I approached deviance as the study of people whose occupations, one might say, was either crime or catching criminals.

Much SI research on crime and deviance has followed Becker in attempting to understand criminals and deviants in terms of the same generic principles—role-taking, impression management, and so on—as anyone else. Deviants are viewed as having “careers,” and deviant acts themselves are viewed as situated accomplishments by self-directed actors. SI researchers have attempted to understand the meanings of criminal/deviant behavior for the people involved in them, e.g., deviant actors, victims, agents of social control, moral entrepreneurs.

Since the difference between a deviant act and a non-deviant act is how it has been defined, another SI strand of work has focused on how some acts become defined as deviant. This approach can be seen in the social problems readings we will read for week 12.


The next core reading, “Peaceful Warriors: Codes for Violence Among Adult Male Bar Fighters” (2013) by Heath Copes, Andy Hochstetler; and Craig J. Forsyth, is another example of excellent research that seeks to understand a crime by learning what it means to the criminals. Copes, Hochstetler and their colleagues have published a large number of works in the criminal interview genre. The bonus readings include 14 of these on such topics as violent crime—“The ‘Code of the Street’ and the Generation of Street Violence in the UK” (Finoa Brookman, Trevor Bennett, Hochstetler & Copes 2011), “Street Codes as Formula Stories: How Inmates Recount Violence” (Brookman, Copes & Hochstetler 2011), and “‘That’s Not Who I Am’: How Offenders Commit Violent Acts and Reject Authentically Violent Selves” (Hochstetler, Copes & Williams 2010)—auto theft/car jacking—“Streetlife and the Rewards of Auto Theft” (Copes 2003), “‘Drive It Like You Stole It.’: Auto Theft and the Illusion of Normalcy” (Michael Cerbonneau & Copes 2006), “The Key to Auto Theft: Emerging Methods of Auto Theft from Offenders’ Perspective” (Copes & Cherbonneau 2006), and “Getting the Upper Hand: Scripts for Managing Victim Resistance in Carjackings” (Copes, Hochstetler & Cherbonneau 2012)—drug use—“Rock Rentals: The Social Organization and Interpersonal Dynamics of Crack-for-Cars Transactions in Louisiana, USA” (Copes, Craig Forsyth and Rod Bruson 2007) and “We Weren’t Like No Regular Dope Fiends: Negotiating Hustler and Crackhead Identities” (Copes, Hochstetler & Patrick Williams 2008)—online piracy—“Transferring Subcultural Knowledge On-Line: Practices and Beliefs of Persistent Digital Pirates” (Thomas Holt & Copes 2010)—crime and gender—“Situational Construction of Masculinity among Male Street Thieves” (Copes & Hochstetler 2003) and “Gender, Identity, and Accounts: How White Collar Offenders Do Gender When Making Sense of Their Crimes” (Paul Klenowski, Copes & Christopher Mullins 2011)—co-offender interaction—“Opportunities and Decisions: Interactional Dynamics in Robbery and Burglary Groups” (Hochstetler 2001)—and crime sprees—“Sprees and Runs: Opportunity Construction and Criminal Episodes” (Hochstetler 2002).


One of the most famous articles on the motives of criminals is David Luckenbill’s “Criminal Homicide as a Situated Transaction” (1977), which relies on analysis of police records (not interviews with criminals). Another Luckenbill bonus reading in this vein is his “Generating Compliance: The Case of Robbery” (1981), which relies on both police records and interviews with offenders and victims.

Other bonus articles on the rationale for and accomplishment of criminal acts include “Constructing Coercion: The Organization of Sexual Assault” (2005) by Brian Monahan, Joseph Marolla and David Bromley; “Up It Up: Gender and the Accomplishment of Street Robbery” (1998) by Jodi Miller; “Gang Fights versus Cat Fights: Urban Young Men’s Gendered Narratives of

“Shifts and Oscillations in Deviant Careers: The Case of Upper-Level Drug Dealers and Smugglers” (1983) by Patti and Peter Adler exemplifies the career approach to deviance. The paper is from Patti’s dissertation research, which resulted in her book Wheeling and Dealing (1993, 2nd ed). Another article from this study, “The Irony of Secrecy in the Drug World” (1980), is included as a bonus reading.


One of the implications of labeling theory is that social control may create more deviance. This is illustrated in the core reading by Kathryn Fox, “Reproducing Criminal Types: Cognitive Treatment for Violent Offenders in Prison” (1999), which uses an institutional selves approach to show how criminal selves may be created by prison treatment programs. Two other Fox articles, “Changing Violent Minds: Discursive Correction and Resistance in the Cognitive Treatment of Violent Offenders in Prison” (1999b) and “Ideological Implications of Addiction Theories and Treatment” (1999c) are bonus readings.

Just as crime is a situated accomplishment, so is victimization. This is illustrated in the next core reading, Jennifer Dunn’s “Innocence Lost: Accomplishing Victimization in Intimate Stalking Cases” (2001). Two other readings by Dunn are bonus readings: “What Love Has to Do with It: The Cultural Construction of Emotion and Sorority Women’s Responses to Forcible Interaction” (1999) and “Vocabularies of Victimization: Toward Explaining the Deviant Victim” (2010).

Other bonus readings on victimization include: “On Being Mugged: The Event and its Aftermath” (1973) by Robert Lejeune and Nicholas Alex; “On Being Stalked” (1998) by Robert


The bonus readings also include a pair by Joel Best on the social organization of deviants—“The Social Organization of Deviants” (1980, with Luckenbill) and “Crime as Strategic Interaction: The Social Organization of Extortion” (1982)—a pair by Robert Emerson on deviance and social control in the context of roommate troubles—“Responding to Roommate Troubles: Reconsidering Informal Dyadic Control” (2008) and “From Normal Conflict to Normative Deviance: The Micro-Politics of Trouble in Close Relationships” (2010)—and a pair by Jeffery Ulmer on commitment to deviance—“Revisiting Stebbins: Labeling and Commitment to Deviance” (1994) and “Commitment, Deviance, and Social Control” (2000).


Finally, Nancy Herman-Kinney’s chapter on “Deviance” (2003) from the Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism gives an overview of the labeling theory perspective.
Week 12: Social Problems

The social constructionist approach to social problems addresses the meanings of social conditions. It examines why certain troubling conditions (but not others) become defined as social problems—through the process of “claimsmaking”—and what sort of problems they are defined as.


The two background readings, both by Joel Best, provide a good history and overview of the perspective. The first is a review essay on Spector and Kitsuse’s book, “Constructing the Sociology of Social Problems: Spector and Kitsuse Twenty-Five Years Later” (2002). The second is Best’s chapter on “Social Problems” (2003) in the Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism.


Nancy Berns provides the next core reading, “Degendering the Problem and Gendering the Blame: Political Discourse on Women and Violence” (2001), from her dissertation research on domestic violence in popular media and discourse. This research resulted in her 2004 book Framing the Victim: Domestic Violence, Media, and Social Problems. Two more articles from this research are included in the course pack as bonus readings: “‘My Problem and How I Solved It’: Domestic Violence in Women’s Magazines” (1999 and “‘When You’re Involved, It’s Just Different’: Making Sense of Domestic Violence” (2007, with David Schweingruber). Her other bonus reading is “The Pet Grief Industry: Framing the Problem of Pet Death” (2013).

One possible result of social problems claimsmaking is the creation of types of people, potential identities that people can voluntarily or involuntarily take on. The remaining three core readings examine the development and application of three such identities: the battered woman, the gifted child, and the ADHD adult.

Donileen Loseke’s “Lived Realities and Formula Stories of ‘Battered Women’” (2001) is a chapter in Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein’s collection Institutional Selves: Troubled Selves in a Postmodern World, which also contained Joseph Hopper’s article on divorced selves we discussed during our week on self and identity. Like Hopper’s chapter, Loseke’s chapter shows how an
institution (the battered women’s support group) pressures people to adopt a particular identity (the “battered woman”). Loseke also explores why some women resist adopting the formula story of the “battered woman” as their identity.


Peter Conrad and Deborah Potter’s “From Hyperactive Children to ADHD Adults: Observations on the Expansion of Medical Categories” (2000) examines the social construction of ADHD in adults, a form of medicalization. Conrad, author of Identifying Hyperactive Children: The Medicalization of Deviant Behavior (1976) and Deviance and Medicalization. From Badness to Sickness (1992, with Joseph Schneider), is one of the key scholars involved in developing the concept of the medicalization of deviance.


The final core reading is Leslie Margolin’s “Goodness Personified: The Emergence of Gifted Children” (1993), about the construction of the “gifted child” and the category’s connection to ideas about race, class and gender.


The most significant debate within the constructionist perspective on social problems—“strict” vs. “contextual” constructionism—began with Steve Woolgar and Dorothy Pawluch’s article “Ontological Gerrymandering: The Anatomy of Social Problems Explanations” (1985). Their position, “strict constructionism,” has not carried the day.


The final bonus reading, co-authored by our department’s own Betty Dobratz with Stephanie L. Shanks-Meile, and Danelle Hallenbeck, is about the social construction of the Ruby Ridge, Idaho, confrontation between federal law enforcement and white supremacists: “What Happened on Ruby Ridge: Terrorism or Tyranny?”
Week 13: Crowds, Behavior in Public and Social Movements

This, our final week of readings, is a bit of a hodgepodge, but that is in keeping with the history of the sociological domain called “collective behavior.” Sociologists have an unfortunate habit of employing what we might call “theoretical gerrymandering”: developing different explanations for behavior in different settings. All too often behavior sociologists examine closely is considered amenable to sociological explanation, while behavior that, for various reasons, goes unexamined may get dismissed as somehow antisocial or irrational (ignoring that all behavior is social and rationality is locally situated).

This has resulted in the area of “collective behavior,” which has included such purported phenomena as social movements, crowds, mobs, panics, riots, gossip, fads, fashion, hysteria, scapegoating, moral panics, urban legends, and disaster behavior. The intellectual rationale for grouping these together is the claim (usually not empirically examined) that they consist of behavior that takes place in ambiguous situations without clear norms.

However, once sociologists have bothered to investigate any of these phenomena, they have found that people are guided by the same sorts of social processes that guide their behavior elsewhere. For instance, during the prominent social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, sociologists, many quite sympathetic to these movements, began to research them. They found that social movement participants were not irrational nor were they riff-raff (two previous stereotypes). The result has been a vibrant field of sociological study.

Symbolic interactionism’s most prominent contribution to the study of social movements has been the introduction of Goffman’s frame analysis as a way of conceptualizing cognitive elements of social movement mobilization and participation. Frame analysis made the leap into the scholarship of social movements via our first core reading, “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation” (1986), by David Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Steven Worden, and Robert Benford. (According to a 2005 editor’s comment in American Sociological Review, the article is one of only 18 ASR articles to be cited over 500 times. It now has over 1,000 citations.)

I’ve included four bonus readings by Benford related to frame analysis. Two are empirical pieces: “‘You Could Be the Hundredth Monkey’: Collective Action Frames and Vocabularies of Motive within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement” (1993) and “Frame Disputes within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement” (1993). The other two are frame analysis overviews: “An Insider’s Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective” (1997) and “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment” (2000, with David Snow).


Another core article related to social movements is “Identity Talk in the Peace and Justice Movement” (1994) by Scott Hunt and Benford. It reflects another key SI focus: the construction of the identities of social movement participants. Patrick Mooney and Hunt’s Rural Sociology article, “Food Security: The Elaboration of Contested Claims to a Consensus Frame” (2009), is included as a bonus reading.

Another bonus article on social movement identities is Stephen Valocchi’s “Activism as a Career, Calling, and Way of Life” (2012).

The final social movements core article is Eric Bonds’ Blumer Award-winning paper “Strategic Role Taking and the Political Struggle: Bearing Witness to the Iraq War” (2009), which examines the strategies of social movement activists who traveled to Iraq during the buildup to the Iraq War.

The study of crowds has an even more checkered history and some of the principal villains have been interactionists. Especially notable was Herbert Blumer’s contention in a 1939 book chapter that people in crowds engage in “circular reaction” rather than “symbolic interaction.”

In his book Myth of the Madding Crowd (1991), Clark McPhail critiques Blumer and other armchair crowd theorists, demonstrating a lack of empirical support for their claims. Blumer is the focus of his article “Blumer’s Theory of Collective Behavior: The Development of a Non-Symbolic Interaction Explanation” (1989), which I’ve included as a bonus reading. McPhail’s background reading, the “Collective Behavior” chapter (2003, with Charles Tucker) in the SI Handbook, provides an overview of SI crowd research.

Another early critic of uninformed crowd theorizing was Carl Couch, whose 1968 article “Collective Behavior: An Examination of Some Stereotypes” anticipated later crowd research. In a 1997 festschrift for Couch, McPhail’s article “Stereotypes of Crowds and Collective Behavior: Looking Backward, Looking Forward” describes Couch’s prescience.

A final bonus reading on sociology’s poor record of crowd research is my own “Mob Sociology and Escalated Force: Sociology’s Contribution to Repressive Police Tactics” (2000).

I’ve included two core readings by McPhail, who was my major professor. “The Crowd and Collective Behavior: Bringing Symbolic Interaction Back In” (2006) was the address given upon the occasion of his winning SSSI’s George Herbert Mead Award. It summarizes his career of crowd research culminating in the large-scale multi-observer data collection that we carried out while I was a graduate student. A second McPhail article, “From Clusters to Arcs and Rings: Elementary Forms of Sociation in Temporary Gatherings” (1994), is a nice overview of elementary forms of crowd behavior.

Three bonus articles by McPhail are “Student Walkout: A Fortuitous Examination of Elementary Collective Behavior” (1969); “The Dark Side of Purpose: Individual and Collective Violence in Riots” (1994), his Midwest Sociological Society Presidential Address; and “Collective Locomotion as Collective Behavior” (1986, with Ron Wohlstein) an interesting experiment that was published in ASR.


Bonus readings in the Goffmanian tradition are Snow, Louis Zurcher, and Robert Peters’ Victory Celebrations as Theater: A Dramaturgical Approach to Crowd Behavior (1981) and “Safe

Bonus Articles: Essays by Interactionists on the Discipline of Sociology

The course pack includes a bonus section of 23 essays about various aspects of the discipline of sociology, including six by Howard Becker and five by Joel Best.

Howard S. Becker’s first contribution is his famous SSSP Presidential Address, “Whose Side Are We On?” (1967) which begins with the question “To have values or not to have values.”

The “modest” in Becker and Bernard Beck’s “Modest Proposals for Graduate Programs in Sociology” (1969) is ironic since one of their suggestions is the Matriculation Degree Award Plan: “Every student shall be awarded the Ph.D. on entrance into the program of graduate study. This degree cannot be revoked. Students may remain in residence for three years at maximum, after which they must leave; but they may leave at any time before and need never show up at all.” Although few of the ideas in the essay may ever be put into practice, it is successful in laying bare how the structure graduate school may conflict with its ostensible purposes.

In another essay on “Graduate Education” (1987), Becker offered piano lessons as a model for graduate education.

Becker is known for his clear writing, which he advocates in “Freshman English for Graduate Students: A Memoir and Two Theories” (1983). He later wrote a trilogy of books on conducting and writing social science research: Writing for Social Scientists (1986), Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You’re Doing It (1998), and Telling About Society (2007).

Although written in 1979, Becker’s “What’s Happening to Sociology?” highlights trends that remain relevant today, especially the fragmentation of the discipline and its effects on graduate education, the disciplinary status system, and academic life. Finally, Becker’s “What Should Sociology Look Like in the (Near) Future?” is a contribution to a Contemporary Sociology symposium on the future of the discipline. Becker takes the question literally, arguing that sociologists should better use visual material in communicating their findings, since, among other reasons “The highly ritualized, formulaic journal article is an incredible impediment to thought and communication.”

Joel Best brings a sharp sense of humor to his essays on the discipline and its foibles. In “Giving It Away: The Ironies of Sociology’s Place in Academia” (2001), he argues that in spite of sociology’s low standing, it has become influential by spinning off other disciplines that use its insights: “It seems as though every time sociologists develop something that looks like it could turn a buck, we get rid of it.”

In, “Social Progress and Social Problems: Toward a Sociology of Gloom” (2001), his MSS presidential address, Best addresses sociologists’ avoidance of acknowledging progress and sets out four paradoxes by which progress raises, rather than diminishes, concern about social problems. In “Killing the Messenger: The Social Problems of Sociology” (2003), his SSSP presidential address he does a social problems analysis of sociology itself as the social problem.

Since Michael Buraway’s presidency of the ASA, sociologists have been debating “public sociology” and several journals have published symposia on the topic. Joel’s article “Why Don’t They Listen to Us? Fashion Notes on the Imperial Wardrobe” (2004), an entry in Social Problems’ symposium, offers some practical advice for bringing attention to sociological texts.

Finally, Joel and I wrote an article called “First Words: Do Sociologists Actually Use the Terms in Introductory Textbooks’ Glossaries?” This was the first in my trilogy of articles demonstrating the gap between introduction to sociology textbooks and published sociological research. The other two are “Looking for the Core in the Wrong Place” (2005) and “The Madding Crowd Goes to School: Myths about Crowds in Introductory Sociology Textbooks” (2005).
Another essay related to teaching is Scott Harris’ “Are Instructors Who Have ‘Practical Experience’ Necessarily Superior to Those Who Don’t?” (Harris 2008).

Two other essays are from a special issue of *The American Sociologist* on informal graduate school socialization. The entire issue is worth reading, but I’ve included the two articles by noted interactionists: Patti and Peter Adler’s “The Identity Career of the Graduate Student: Professional Socialization to Academic Sociology” (2005) and Gabrielle Ferrales and Gary Alan Fine’s “Sociology as a Vocation: Reputations and Group Cultures in Graduate School” (2005). The Ferrales & Fine piece provoked a critical response from Antony Puddephatt, Benjamin Kelly and Michael Adorjan on “Unveiling the Cloak of Competence: Cultivating Authenticity in Graduate Sociology” (2006).

The presidential address is often used to discuss trends within sociology. The final readings are six such addresses: Norm Denzin’s MSS presidential address “The Sociological Imagination Revisited” (1990), which includes a take-down of C. Wright Mills; Lynn Smith-Lovin’s Southern Sociological Society address “Core Concepts and Common Ground: The Relational Basis of Our Discipline”; the Adlers’ MSS address “Of Rhetoric and Representation: The Four Faces of Ethnography” (2008); and three addresses by presidents of the Pacific Sociological Society. These are Lynn Lofland’s “Is Peace Possible?: An Analysis of Sociology” (1990), Thomas Scheff’s “A Vision of Sociology” (1997), and David Snow’s “The Value of Sociology” (1999).
Appendix: Asking Good Questions about Journal Articles

Here are some of my thoughts about asking good questions about journal articles. I offer them to help you to prepare discussion questions for class, but perhaps they will also be useful as you read the articles yourselves.

One of the keys to asking good questions about a journal article is to understand what choices the author(s) have made. This becomes easier the more articles you read since you can see the variety of approaches they take. These choices are important to understand since ultimately you will be making choices about what to research, how to conduct the research and how to report your findings.

One of the choices the authors of the articles in this class have made was to work from a symbolic interactionist framework or use concepts from the symbolic interactionist toolkit. This raises the questions like:

What is distinctly interactionist about this article? How might other sociologists approach this topic?

The purpose of theory is to simplify. Any theoretical perspective directs our attention to some aspects of the phenomena while telling us, implicitly or explicitly, that other aspects are epiphenomenal, less important, or should be bracketed out of the analysis. In other words, every perspective has blind spots. This raises questions like:

What were the benefits of the interactionist approach to this study? What did it find that a study with a different perspective might have missed?

Are their shortcomings to the article due to its interactionist orientation?

Would this article have been stronger if it had used the concept of [false consciousness, latent function, habitus, panopticon, etc.]?

Authors of these articles also made choices to use particular interactionist concepts or approaches instead of others. This raises questions like:

The author of this article claims to have undertaken a constructionist analysis. Did the article take an objectivist or interpretive constructionist approach? How did that decision affect the article’s analysis and conclusions?

Common interactionist conceptualizations of the self include social objects, processes, structures, and dramatic effects. Which of these did the author of this article use to conceptualize the self? How might have other conceptualizations contributed to the analysis?

A typical sociology journal article includes sections on methods, findings and conclusions. The methods section describes how the author(s) conducted the research; it’s supposed to convince the reader that the study’s design and implementation led to findings that can be trusted and prepare the reader for the type of findings that will be presented. The findings in a quantitative article are typically presented as a table of numbers decorated with little stars and daggers. A qualitative article often includes the authors’ assertion of what they found supported by examples from field notes or
transcripts or other supporting data. The conclusions section interprets those findings to argue that (1) the study uncovered something interesting about the phenomena in question and/or (2) the paper developed some theoretical (or methodological) tool that would be of use beyond this particular study.

The authors have convinced someone, i.e., editors and reviewers, that all of these assertions and arguments hang together well enough for the article to be published, but you need to make these judgments yourself. You might conclude that the article is seriously flawed, or that you would have liked some more evidence, or that the authors’ brilliance blew your mind.

This raises questions like these:

*How did the author’s choice to [interview one type of person but not another, do ethnography in this setting instead of another one, etc.] affect the findings [for better or worse]?*

*How did the authors’ presentation of the findings contribute to [or detract from] the strength of their argument? Could it have been improved?*

*Are you convinced that the evidence in the article supports the authors’ conclusions? If not, what went wrong?*

*Is the paper’s conceptual innovation a useful development? Or just new jargon to confuse graduate students?*

*Is there something useful here that you can use in your own research?*

Discussion questions need to be tailored to the details of the article. It helps if you have some specific reason for asking the question so that if nobody takes it up, you can follow up with “The reason I asked that question is because…”

— David Schweingruber