Symbolic interactionism

- Society viewed as ongoing interaction using symbols
- Unlike other perspectives, focus is micro/interactional level, not social structure
- Social order is possible because of shared meanings, which arise from interaction and interpretation
- Three main premises (Herbert Blumer):
  1. People act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them
  2. These meanings arise out of interaction with other people
  3. These meanings are modified through interpretation as people deal with the things they encounter
- More than other perspectives, focuses on how people construct social reality

Social construction of reality

- Social construction of reality (Newman): process through which the members of a society discover, make known, reaffirm, and alter a collective version of facts, knowledge, and “truth” (p. 56)
- Social construction of reality (Schweingruber): process through which the members of a society discover, make known, reaffirm, and alter a collective version of facts, knowledge, and “truth” (Schweingruber, 2008)
- We live in two worlds, the physical world and the world of meanings
- These steps in attaching meanings to things:
  - Typifying: Characterizing what a typical X is like
  - Naming: Attaching symbols (‘X’) to those parts
  - Categorizing: dividing up physical world into parts
- People act toward things based on the meanings attached to them
- Conflict theorists focus on how some people have more power to give meanings than others

Cup vs. glass

- Age 3: cup, little cup, big cup, coffee cup, paper cup
- Age 12: cup, glass, fruit cup, wine glass, juice glass, Dixie cup, measuring cup, mug, beer mug, etc.

Some socially constructed categories

- Colors (number of colors in languages varies from 2-12)
- Animals: food, pets, endangered, vermin
- Time: weeks, linear, cyclical, clock time, time as commodity
- Races: white, black, Asian, American Indian, etc.
- Sexes: man, woman, etc.
- Moral/legal/medical labels: Criminal, sinner, mentally ill; juvenile delinquent, super predator, gifted, sexual predator,
- Social problems (e.g., domestic violence, stalking, sexual harassment, acquaintance rape)
Cross-cultural differences in color terms

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