

# Development of the self and social order in society



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

We use our social selves to produce social order in various ways, and many sociologists have explored exactly how and why we do this. Four major symbolic interactionists, George Herbert Mead, Charles Cooley, Tamotsu Shibutani, and Erving Goffman, explore the production of self and order in theoretical ways. Three other major symbolic interactionists, Howard Becker, Arlie Hochschild, and Joan Emerson explore the same production of self and order in empirical research. In this essay, I will first summarize the theories of the first four symbolic interactionists (Mead, Cooley, Shibutani, and Goffman), then I will analyze the empirical data provided by Becker, Hochschild, and Emerson, and then finally I will show how the empirical research forms and supports the views of the theoretical essays.

George Herbert Mead begins his essay with stating that we cannot see our self the same way we see our body, and that they are separate parts. He says that the self is an object, but that it is different than other objects in that it is also distinguished as a conscious, or as experiences. (Mead 1934)

The main aspect of his theory is that the self emerges from social interactions in various ways, and that the social self is important to distinguish and focus on. He states that “ the self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience.” (Mead: 123) The social self arises from observing and interacting with society, taking in and considering other’s opinions and feelings about oneself, and considering one’s opinion about themselves.

According to Mead, the self is not a part of a person from birth, but is molded, changed, and adapted over time and interaction. (Mead 1934) With interaction and conversation, we also constantly interact with our own self

that affects what we say and when we say it. Mead explains it as a “conversation of gestures” (Mead: 123), where we think of saying something, which makes us think about how we would reply and may change our answer. Mead states that if we think of something to say, and then realize that it is cruel, we will change what we are about to say because we ask our self if it is cruel to say, effectively checking our self. (Mead 1934) He then goes on to state that we carry a different self with different people,” we are one thing to one man and another thing to another.” (Mead: 124) As a result of these “multiple personalities,” every self also has a “me” and an “I.” The “me” consists of what one is expected to do and learns in interaction with others. People learn about their self by observing how others treat them. For an example, if someone treats a person as a man, they will then develop a sense of them as a man. On the other hand, the “I” reacts through the “me.” Mead states that “It is only after have acted that we know what we have done; it is only after we have spoken that we know what we have said.” (Mead 125) The “I” is essentially a response to the “me.”

Charles Horton Cooley champions the idea of the “looking-glass self,” the idea that the development of one’s self comes through how others view them. Our self is developed through the “looking-glass,” what we think others see us as. (Cooley 1983) Cooley states that there are three main components of this idea: how we imagine our appearance to the other person; how we think they feel about that appearance; and how we feel about that judgement. (Cooley 1983) He states that the second element isn’t recognizable in a typical looking-glass, and that that’s the point. We only imagine this judgement, and we can only guess how the other person truly

feels about our self. Cooley also shows that we use that imaginary judgement in our own analysis; “ we are ashamed to seem evasive in the presence of a straightforward man, cowardly in the presence of a brave one...” (Cooley: 126) We assume their judgement and base our feelings off of that. He then explains that children learn this self-image very quickly when they study the actions of others and perceive their own actions and changes. They will see what power they can exert over other’s actions, and hope for a certain effect. (Cooley 1983) He finishes his essay by stating that we do certain actions, say certain things, based on the effect that we think or know that they will have.

Tamotsu Shibutani speaks about how people act based on the definition of the situation they are in. (Shibutani 1961) A person decides their role in the situation, decides how they act in the situation, and what they are obligated to do. He states that once someone has adopted a certain point of view, it becomes how they view the world, and they use that reference group with every situation that they encounter. (Shibutani 1961) He then speaks about a Princeton vs. Dartmouth game, where students from different schools had very different conceptions about what happened during the game, even though they were in the same stadium. Reference groups are essential and can also cause misunderstandings. People of different cultures also have different reference groups, and according to their culture, they have a different set of references and acceptable actions. (Shibutani 1961)

Erving Goffman championed the idea of dramaturgy, the theory that people are actors, and that interaction is a stage. His idea was that there is an order to social interaction: the structure, the process, and the products. He called <https://assignbuster.com/development-of-the-self-and-social-order-in-society/>

this the interaction order. (Charon 2009) He also believed that people have to acquire information about people and their mood, their view of us, and which of their identities they are adhering to at the moment. To do this, we depend on the person's " front," their appearance, and the setting to determine what type of role we are playing. (Charon 2009) Goffman thought that when we interacted with others, we put on a specific role based on the situation and who we are talking to, and act as an audience for their performance as well. We are social actors, and we rely on our environment, dialect, shared experiences and context to perform. (Charon 2009) Goffman agreed with Mead in that society was central to forming a person's self and the social order. However, he placed much more emphasis on how the interaction forms social order and the binding of society. He believed that social interaction must have consistency with self-presentation, that people must support the other's projection of their self, and that people must respect other's ritual expressions. (Charon 2009) In all, he thought that if these basic principles weren't committed to, that society itself would degrade.

Howard S. Becker's empirical research was focused on marijuana users. The goal of his research was not to associate certain personality traits with marijuana use, but to describe the change of a person's attitude and experiences that would facilitate them to use marijuana for pleasure. (Becker: 221) He first states that a novice smoker will have a difficult time getting a high the first couple tries, and that if nothing happens, the user can't perceive marijuana as an object used for pleasure. This is because the user hasn't yet experienced pleasure directly associated with the drug, and

therefore can't imagine it giving pleasure. This is also complicated by many people being ashamed to admit that they do not know how to use it correctly, and instead learn by indirect observation. (Becker 1953) Becker states that no one used marijuana for pleasure without finding a way to get the effect of pleasure. If they did not find a method that worked, they considered the drug meaningless. He then goes on to state that another issue with marijuana use is that the user must connect the symptoms of being high with the drug itself. (Becker 1953) He notices that many of the users only associated the symptoms of being high when other, more experienced users, pointed out the symptoms within themselves. Lastly, Becker states that the user must feel that the symptoms are pleasurable to continue using. If the user doesn't enjoy the symptoms, he won't continue use because he associates the drug with the unpleasantness of the symptoms. (Becker 1953)

Arlie Hochschild talks about the experience of training to be a flight attendant, specifically at Delta Airlines. She begins her essay by talking about the handout she was given before she even had an interview, that talked about the various traits and personas that the prospective flight attendant should have. She talks about the various roles the flight attendant plays, and that they must be "enthusiastic" but not "effervescent," "modest" but "friendly." She then goes on to explain the intense training that the attendants must go through, sitting through lectures from 8:30AM to 4:30PM every day. (Hochschild 1983) Hochschild talks about how the trainers acted, and the fronts that they instructed the flight attendants to put on. She then speaks about the "homey" feeling they must project to the passengers

at all times, even though a plane is relatively more dangerous than one's home. Hochschild then ends her story with stating that there is a sense of stress associated with the work; more specifically that maintaining the balance between one's self and their feelings, and one's self and the display they most put on. (Hochschild 1983)

Joan Emerson talks about gynecological examinations and how they relate to how people act in private places. She begins with stating that everyone involved understands what role they play; for example, the woman knows she has to undress and put her feet up in stirrups, the doctor knows he has to come in and examine the woman's genitals, the nurse knows what tools to bring in, what questions to ask before the doctor comes in, and that she has to be present as a chaperone. She states that every "actor" in the situation knows how to put on a credible "performance." (Emerson 1970) Emerson also states that everyone involved has to believe that it is a gynecological exam, not a party, sexual assault, or experiment. She explains that the scene is credible, and everyone believes that the performance is a gynecological exam because every actor acts as if they know what they are doing, and that if they did not the credibility would be shattered. (Emerson 1970) Emerson explains that the reality of the exam is precarious, because when one theme is acknowledged, the others must be undermined. The opposite is always in mid during this, because the actors must work to suppress the unwanted themes and exemplify the ideal themes. (Emerson 1970)

The empirical essays, and the information given within them, show key examples and real-life applications of the theories presented in the earlier

<https://assignbuster.com/development-of-the-self-and-social-order-in-society/>

theoretical works. For example, in Shibutani's article, he speaks about the role that one takes when they are in a certain situation. In Emerson's article speaking about gynecological exams, she shows exactly what this theory means. The doctor, the patients, and the nurses all know what type of situation they are in and take on a certain type of role to ensure that the situation is maintained. Goffman's theories can also explain the roles taken. In his dramaturgical approach, the doctors, nurses, and patients are all actors and the exam is the play they are putting on. They all take on a role, and act accordingly so as to not shatter the reality of the "play" they are putting on. Another example is Becker's research on marijuana smokers. He states that people who have not smoked marijuana before have not had the experience of being high, and must emulate others so as not to break the role they are playing. They take social cues from others, and adapt that to their own experience, so they know what it is like to be high, and associate that with marijuana. Cooley's theory of the "looking-glass" self also applies. The novice smokers are concerned with how the experienced smokers see them, so instead of admitting their inexperience, they watch them closely and mimic them, to provoke the "correct" response. They assume how the experienced smokers see them and change their actions accordingly. Mead's research about interacting with society to form our self is shown in Hochschild's research done with flight attendants. The flight attendants must interact with each passenger and adapt their self to adequately serve the passenger. The flight attendant must interact with their self as a buffer to ensure that what they say does not offend or frighten the passenger. All in all, each of the experiences of empirical data prove and cement the theoretical ideas presented.



In conclusion, the ideas and theories presented by the four researchers (Mead, Cooley, Shibutani, and Goffman) show various beliefs on how the self and social order is created within our society. The empirical research provided by Becker, Hochschild, and Emerson proves these theories and shows their validity and relevance in everyday life. While each of the researcher's views are different and show different examples of social order, they are all equally valid and provide different glimpses on how the self and social order is formed.

## References

- Charon, Joel M. 2007. *Symbolic Interactionism: an Introduction, an Interpretation, an Integration* . Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- O' Brien, Jodi. 2011. *The Production of Reality* . 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.