

# Symbolic interactionism: theories and everyday life essay sample



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Symbolic interactionism is a sociological school that remains less politically radical than conflict theory and sheds the restraints of the idea of structure that is the core of the structural functionalist school. Reality and the social processes that create rational action is the basic premise of the study done within the school. The process of defining individuals through labeling as a construct of society is, also, important to theorists. The most notable symbolic interactionists, are arguably, Georg Simmel, George Herbert Mead, and Charles Cooley. Though many scholars have followed in the wake of these great thinkers, they began the inquiry of understanding how society and self are constantly changing due to the effect one has on the other. Language, interactions, and associations are common terms and tools for current study due to the early work of the theorists noted. I, too, can connect much of the substantial ideas on interaction by constantly reviewing both my role in society and society's influence on me.

Garner (2000) helps to define symbolic interactionism and the contributions made by the theorists above. Examples of how symbolic interactionism can be constructed as part of everyday social reality is explained by Heiner (2006). Heiner states that this school “ focuses on the ways people think and give meaning to the world”. Through language and other communication, we as social beings, interpret the actions around us to define our lives and our realities, which are constantly changing. For example, since I am considered a student, I am expected to have clear career goals and study hard to maintain those goals. But due to the economic crisis, some jobs have emerged as more “ recession-proof” and my goals have changed. So due to outside forces and internal cues, I am

constantly changing goals as society changes. This, in turn, changes my reality and the way I interpret social realities due to the communications I interpret from the media and other sources.

According to Herbert Blumer (1996), there are three core principles to this theory; meaning, language, and thought. As stated above, we all give meaning to certain people and things, just as I have meaning to others as a student and this meaning can define how I am regarded by others.

Language is the medium by which interaction between people takes place in order to use symbols and other modes to make definitions more clear. When I am walking around with books, most assume I am a student and if I communicate to others that I am, indeed a student, then the reality of the situation changes depending on the interpretation of the other person. For example, when I have told graduate students that I am an undergraduate, they immediately begin to regard me as a different, less respected person. The caps and gowns worn at graduation, too, are symbols of achievement and help to change the reality of the new graduate to their new position in life. Finally, thought is considered to be a dialogue with the self to help interpret reality and judge those around us.

In conclusion, this theory is much different than conflict theory and structural function. The basic premise is that reality is not static and is constantly changing due to our associations with others and our interpretations of our interactions. Meaning, language, and thought are also important aspects of this theory. It is probably more important to use personal experience and life examples in this school than in others, due to the personal dialogue that is so important. Symbolic interactionism, requires personal reflection and <https://assignbuster.com/symbolic-interactionism-theories-and-everyday-life-essay-sample/>

connection in order for this school to make clearer sense and to constantly re-evaluate our realities using the ideas presented by theorists.

#### Works Cited

Roberta Garner, *Social Theory: Continuity and Confrontation* , Broadview Press: New York, 2000.

Robert Heiner, *Social Problems: An Introduction to Critical Constructionism*, Oxford University Press: New York, 2006.

The Society for More Creative Speech. “ Symbolic Interactionism as Defined by Herbert Blumer, 1996.