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BOOK REVIEW

All You Need To Know About Social Identity

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Negotiating Identity: Symbolic Interactionist Approaches to Social Identity

By Susie Scott. Cambridge. Polity Press, 2015.

I am reminded of Mills' claim that "[t]o overcome the academic *prose* you have first to overcome the academic *pose*" (Wright Mills, 1959, pp. 218-219) when reading Scott's book, *Negotiating Identity: Symbolic Interactionist Approaches to Social Identity*. Scott is a writer who writes, not for status, but for her audience in such a fluid way that her status within the field is assured. Scott has overcome academic pose, prose and landed in academic poise: writing for the reader in an accessible, interesting manner. There is no doubt that Scott has a wealth of knowledge regarding the theoretical field yet she handles this wealth with respect for the labyrinth of Goffmanian phrases, terms and concepts that can leave the reader of his original texts confused and frustrated. Scott shows us how social identity is constructed in everyday life, using illustrations from a multitude of empirical studies to present a comprehensive, almost encyclopedic, book.

Chapter one introduces the reader to the central concept of identity with particular focus on social identity, formed through "face-to-face encounters in everyday life" (p.4). The symbolic interactionist and Goffmanian dramaturgical building blocks of the book are then explored providing a broad yet detailed and accessible overview of the perspective. This is a theme

that continues throughout the book: Scott examines her topic exhaustively, gathering the myriad of Goffmanian concepts that frequently were developed, overlapped, or just referred to by a different name throughout his academic career, and presents them in a comprehensible, understandable way. It is for this reason that this book can be seen as a Goffmanian bible. Scott approaches identity as being a process continuously unfolding and developing, as being performative, done in interaction with others and thirdly, it is pragmatic, observable through the lines of action taken.

Chapter 2 uses the interaction order to explore how we co-operate towards agreeing on the situational definitions of focused and unfocused social encounters in public places. Chapter 3 takes a look at how we use “talk-in-interaction, as a tool of identity performance” (p.21), exploring ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, aligning actions and frame analysis. Each section is filled with easy-to-understand definitions and interesting empirical studies and support. The next chapter moves on to how we design and display social roles and use facework to sustain them. The ways in which we perform the self and make our social roles using props, gestures, the body, lines and moves is presented. Chapter 5 looks at performance teams and the various strategies in order to be able to co-operatively interact to sustain a joint definition of the situation. This is a particularly interesting chapter due to Scott’s knowledge of the research field and writing ease which when, combined, ensure that a range of relevant studies which have applied and developed Goffmanian theory regarding team performances are presented in a straight-forward, explanatory manner. The reader is shown how the interaction order can be revealed with dramaturgical theory in a plethora of situations and with a multitude of actors. Chapter 6 looks at how our identities change over the course of our lives, shaped by interactions with others. Such careers can involve stigmatisation and deviation thus requiring us to find new ways of negotiating these

morally deviant identities. The penultimate chapter goes into how social organisations and institutions shape our identities by working on our selfhood. One of the highlights in this chapter is Scott's development or perhaps modernisation of Goffman's theory on total institutions to reinventive institutions: entering institutions which totally encompass the individuals in the search for self-improvement. The final chapter 8 uncovers the dark side of impression management, manipulation, betrayal and deception in order to intentionally mislead others.

This is a book that can be used on undergraduate and postgraduate levels, obviously within sociology, but also within many of the other strands of the social sciences. I would even suggest that this is a book that has such a rare talent as to be valid outside the discipline – any profession involving face-to-face interaction would benefit from having this as obligatory reading. The language flows and is easy to understand also making this book an option for students who do not have English as their first language. It translates Goffman, and others, into comprehension. It is also a fun book to read. This should not be underestimated when setting obligatory reading lists for students who risk facing page after page of theoretical navel gazing. In short, this is a vital contribution to the field of symbolic interaction.

REFERENCES

Wright Mills, Charles. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

Lisa Flower is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Lund, Sweden. Lisa's research interests include sociology of emotion, courtroom ethnography, criminology, and sociology of professions. She is currently working on her doctoral

dissertation on the emotion management and impression management strategies of defence lawyers, centering on the performance of loyalty and teamwork. Lisa teaches sociological and criminological theory, and qualitative research methods at Lund University.