I. Social Interaction in Everyday Life

A. Social Structure: Guides human behavior rather than rigidly determining it
   1. A collective reality that exists apart from individuals, constructing the
      context in which people interact.
   2. Social System: An arrangement of relationships existing apart from the
      specific people involved.
B. **Social Interaction**: the process by which people act and react in relation to others

1. Acts people perform toward each other and the responses they give in return.

2. **Personal Agency**: The Ability to have an effect on one's own environment

3. **Interaction process**: Ways in which partners agree on their goals, negotiate behavior, and distribute resources

4. Social interaction includes a large number of behaviors, so many that in sociology interaction is usually divided into five categories

5. **Types of Social Interaction**
   a. **Exchange**: The process in which people transfer goods, services, and other items with each other.
      • Exchange is a social process whereby social behavior is exchanged for some type of reward for equal or greater value.
   b. **Competition**: Process by which two or more people/groups attempt to obtain the same goal
      • Scarce resources are unequally distributed.
      • This concept is very familiar and important to Americans considering the idea of competition is built into our economy and society
      • Yet, the jury is still out whether this competition produces the assumed results of the “best rising to the top”
   c. **Cooperation**: The process in which people work together to achieved shared goals
      • Usually this involves the giving up of individual goals for group goals
   d. **Conflict**: The process by which people attempt to physically or socially conquer each other.
      • Although war is the most obvious example of this, this is done most often in social situations (ex. politics, threats, etc.)
   e. **Coercion**: Process by which people compel other people to do something against their will – based ultimately on force.
      • The state usually handles this through official means (police, army, etc.) but individuals use it in social situations as well (parents, friends, lovers – sex)
   f. No one type of interaction describes social reality – it involves a mix and match of different ones.
C. Components of Interaction

- As we have discussed many times, people’s actions in society are most always unconscious.
- They are usually based on different linkages we have with society.

1. **Status**: A recognized social position that an individual occupies
   a. A position in society (ex. teacher, daughter, mother, doctor, etc.) that is characterized by certain rights and obligations.
   - Statuses can determine how people interact
   - We have to be aware of using the wrong interaction when dealing with different statuses
   b. **Status Set**: Consists of all the statuses a person holds at a given time
   - The collection of statuses that a person occupies at any one time

c. **Ascribed and Achieved Statuses**
   - Sociology usually distinguishes between two types of statuses: ascribed and achieved
     - An **Ascribed Status** is a social position that someone receives at birth or involuntarily assumes later in life
     - A status that cannot be changed by individual effort – we have them whether we want them or not (ex. age, sex, race, ethnicity – religion and class can also be ascribed but may be changed).
     - An **Achieved Status** is a social position that someone assumes voluntarily and that reflects personal ability and effort
     - Obtained through individual effort (ex. education and occupation).
     - Usually comes out through a combination of effort, ability, and luck.
     - In many cases, achieved and ascribed statuses are closely related – men (ascribed) usually have higher incomes and education (achieved).
     - Class and Race/Ethnicity also play an important role in our achieved status

d. **Master Status**: A status that has exceptional importance for social identity, often shaping a person's entire life
   - **Master Status**: One status that is more important than the others
   - It has the greatest impact on a person's self-identity and appearance to others.
   - People usually organize their lives and identity around it.
   - It is their main social identity (ex. occupation, familial, etc.)
2. **Role**: A role consists of behavior expected of someone who holds a particular status
   
a. **Role**: The expected behavior associated with a status
   
   - *A status is a social position and a role is the behavior of that position.*
   - Role expectations are powerful, so powerful that if we diverge too far from what is expected we encounter resistance.

b. Some characteristics of roles:
   
   - Role performance differs from role expectation
   - Roles are relational, organizing our behavior toward some other person
   - **Role Set** refers to a number of roles attached to a single status
     
     - A collection of roles associated with a given status

   c. **Role Conflict and Role Strain**
      
      - **Role conflict** refers to incompatibility among roles corresponding to two or more different statuses
        
        - Incompatibility of different roles played by a single person – or difficult moral choices.
          
          - Competing and conflicting demands stemming from a role set
        
        - It can be reduced by:
          
          - Defining some roles as more important than others
          - Setting priorities
          - Insulating roles from one another

      - **Role Strain** refers to incompatibility among roles corresponding to a single status
        
        - The attempt to meet incompatible expectations within a single status

      - **Role Stress**: The anxiety produced by being unable to meet all role requirements at the same time.

      - **Role Exit**: The process by which people disengage from social roles that have been central in their lives
- Goffman came up with the concept of **Role Distance**: This is where we play our roles in society without really meaning it, and with an ulterior motive in mind
- We play our roles with the thoughts in the back of our heads that these actions are diametrically opposed (contrary) to what we really think and believe
  - This is the only way human dignity can be maintained within our self-awareness.
    - This includes all cases where a role is played deliberately without any inner-identification
    - Where the actor has established an inner distance between his consciousness and his role playing
D. Social Construction of Reality: The process by which individuals creatively shape reality through social interaction

1. The **Thomas Theorem**: states that situations we define as real become real in their consequences

2. **Ethnomethodology**: a subfield of sociology developed by Harold Garfinkel which studies the way people make sense of their everyday lives
   a. This approach is linked to both dramaturgy and symbolic interaction
      - But it focuses on the very basic assumptions of everyday life
      - We rarely think of these rules or even recognize their existence
      - We assume that everyone shares our version of reality and rarely question its underlying assumptions
      - Ethnomethodology: The *methodology* for studying the common understanding of everyday life (Harold Garfinkel)
      - Belief that we share a sense of reality with other people by following social rules.
      - These rules are unspoken and deeply embedded in our culture – so embedded that we are not aware of their existence.
      - His goal – the goal of ethnomethodology is to bring these rules to the surface and determine the effect they have on our behavior.
      - Garfinkel attempted to demonstrate these unspoken rules by conducting experiments – *breaching experiments*.
        - **Breaching experiment**: a procedure whereby the experimenter violates a suspected rule and observes people’s reaction to the violation
          - The power of this experiment comes from the fact that it is so simple.
          - Something to think about though, are breaching experiments showing the weakness of society – or its strength?

b. Establishes a major point in sociology: *Orderly social interaction is only possible if we all abide by social rules that we rarely notice.*
3. **Exchange Theory**
   a. Exchange Theory focuses on the exchanges that we perform with one another on a daily basis.
      - Although we always think of monetary exchange – there are other kinds of exchange – especially emotional, that allow us to act with one another in an ordered way.
      - **Norm of Reciprocity**: If you do something for a person, they must do something of approximately equal social value in return.
        - They may be informal obligations, but people usually take them seriously because people don’t like to owe anybody anything – they would rather have someone owe them.
        - If someone continually fails to reciprocate, we usually end the social interaction (lending money, doing favors, sending cards, etc.)
   b. Exchange creates complex social relations to the point that whoever is involved in the most profitable exchanges becomes the more powerful
E. **Dramaturgy**: Developed by Erving Goffman, consists of the definition of social interaction in terms of theatrical performance

1. Goffman’s approach to studying behavior is important because it focuses on the everyday occurrences we experience in life.
   a. He is able to show how we gain meaning from social interaction and common situations.
   b. Goffman developed an approach he called *dramaturgy*, where social interaction can be viewed as a series of small plays.
   c. Interactions are scripted by the roles of participants.
   d. We have these roles because we are socialized to know what others expect our behavior to be in different situations.
   e. People become skilled at what role to play and when to play it.
      - Patterns begin to develop as to what roles each person plays, making it easier to see how each person deals with certain situations.

2. The **Presentation of Self**: the effort of an individual to create specific impressions in the minds of others

3. Goffman believed that everyone in society followed a script – these scripts are usually unstated, but everyone in society understands them and they go into making up our ordered interaction in society.
   a. The **script** is a set of rules that everyone must follow in order to deal with particular situations.
      - Our role performances are judged the same way dramatic performances are judged by critics.
      - We can perform badly or well.
      - Goffman noted that people help us perform our roles to the point of ignoring mistakes or problems with our performance.
         - We have a need to keep society orderly, thus we let people make mistakes in order to keep society running smoothly (ex. If someone does something embarrassing, we usually ignore it – don’t make a big deal about it – in order to keep going)
         - They pretend not to notice so we don’t even get embarrassed
      - **Studied Non-Observance**: Pretending not to notice a mistake in role performance.
b. The dramaturgical approach takes an audience into account when we act in our roles
   • Just like in a theater, we have a **front region**, where we play a role before an audience
   • This is where formal (public) and official role-playing is done.
   • And a **back region**, where we play a different role with a different audience.
   • This is where informal (private) role-playing is done – setting up for the next performance, rehearsing, relaxing, etc.

c. People engage in **impression management**, whereby we consciously manipulate props, scenery, costumes, and behavior in attempt to manipulate a situation and other people (ex. job interviews).

d. **Nonverbal communication**: Consists of communication using body movements, gestures and facial expressions rather than speech
   • Most of it is culture specific
   • Close attention to non-verbal communication is often an effective way to tell whether someone is telling the truth or not

e. People have called Goffman’s approach overly cynical.
   • His use of the idea of a stage play with actors makes it sound like all we do is perform and fool others (like a con-man), but Goffman points out that very few people have the skill to manipulate the situation.

F. **Other Things**
1. Gender affects personal performance in areas such as:
   a. Demeanor
   b. Use of **Personal Space**: the surrounding area over which an individual makes some claim to privacy
   c. Staring, smiling, and touching