

The Postmodern Self; A Theoretical Consideration

By: Kenneth Allan

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Abstract:

The postmodern self consists solely of fragmented, situational images that result in an emotional flatness or depthlessness. Goffman's work has been presented as a precursor of postmodernism and recent literature has used Goffman to argue for the postmodern, non-essential, transient self. This essay presents a critique of the postmodern assumption that symbols have become divorced from everyday interaction and argues that Goffman did not disallow an essential self; throughout his writings he recognized its place outside the interaction order. It is further argued that the phenomena of the postmodern self can be understood in terms of generalized, abstracted principles. Self is presented as a function of an individual's interaction - ritual density and linguistic code. Based on Mead's notion of the self as a cognitive, internalized conversation of gestures, the self is conceptualized as varying along two dimensions: the interaction ritual continuum taken from Durkheim, Goffman, and Collins, and the linguistic code continuum taken from Bernstein, Douglas, and Bourdieu. The argument is summarized in a series of propositional statements.

Article:

Postmodernism posits a fragmented self that has no essence, only images. Jameson (1984) argues that the simple and indivisible ego-self existed at one time, during the period of classical capitalism and the nuclear family, but has come to an end in the postmodern era. The postmodern self is fragmented and decentered with a kind of emotional flatness or depthlessness. According to Gergen (1991), postmodern culture erases the category of self. The self is erased as the person is saturated with images from the media that "...furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self (Gergen 1991:6). The images of the postmodern self are the reality of the postmodern self (Tseñlon 1991).

My purpose in this paper is to present an interpretation based on generic, theoretical principles as to what this fragmented self might be and why it has been proposed. I am not concerned with producing a general theory of the self, though the elements I consider would certainly be included in such a theory. It is my position that the self is a social construction and is constructed in the modern/postmodern era much the same as it has been constructed in past eras. I propose a two component theory of the construction of self Based on Mead's insight into the social genesis of self, I draw on Bernstein, Douglas, and Bourdieu to posit a linguistic continuum. The second dimension, ritual density, comes from Durkheim and is explicated through the work of Collins.

in the first part of the paper I offer a critique of the postmodern assumption that signs/symbols have become divorced from the everyday world of social interaction. It is this assumption that allows postmodernism to analyze culture alone and to develop a perspective of a fragmented self. Viewing Goffman as a precursor to postmodernism and a major proponent of the situated-fragmented self; I argue that Goffman himself has a concept of a core-sacred self and that this concept is very much in keeping with my own. I argue for a two component theory of self and maintain that the postmodern phenomena of the fragmented self may be explained theoretically using abstracted, generalized concepts.

The Postmodern Perspective

Postmodernism is a critique of capitalism, positivism, and the assumption that reality is somehow represented in the symbols we use (Jameson 1984). Rossi (1983) notes the difference between the sociology of signs and the sociology of symbols. A sociology of symbols is concerned with the subjective experience of actors in social interaction and the symbols that express some affective or cognitive aspect of that experience. A sociology of signs is concerned with the objective relation of signs to one another in some form of text. Central to postmodern analysis is the concept of the sign. According to postmodern thought, we are in the third stage of the sign: the sign has become reality. During the first stage of the sign (the Middle Ages), there was a direct relationship between the sign and its corresponding reality. The capitalist ideology was consumer-as-user. During the third stage (the postmodern), the sign itself has become reality (image as commodity) and the capitalist ideology is consumer-as-subject, objects are consumed for their social worth not their use value (Baudrillard 1981, 1983; Denzin 1991, 1992)

The shift to the third stage of the sign was facilitated by advertising. The act of advertising itself reduces objects from their use value to their sign value (Baudrillard 1983); as advertisements became commodities in and of themselves, image rather than information became the content of the commodity (Denzin 1991). Advertising is the key in transmitting the culture and the self of the postmodern: the postmodern is passed on through worlds of commodity consumption that are represented and presented in the media (Denzin 1991, 1992; Saco 1992; Manning 1991).

Signs, for the postmodernist, do not have inherent meaning but significance is ascribed as the sign is read as part of a "text." Every reading of a text becomes itself a text, an accounting, and an object for analysis. Postmodernist analysis seeks to "deconstruct" the text and uncover how the text is constructed and given meaning; that is, how signs are related to other signs within the field and to ideologies. Thus, much of postmodern analysis focuses on cultural representations and makes inferences from culture to society, social interaction, and self. Analysis is concerned with "...the production, distribution, and consumption of cultural texts; the reading and analysis of these texts; and the relationship between these texts and the everyday world..." (Denzin 1991:18).

The intellectual heritage of separating symbols/signs/culture from social interaction began with the French structuralist school and the work of Levi-Strauss and Saussure (Kurzweil 1980; Maryanski and Turner 1991). French structuralism regards language as the underlying reality for all social phenomena. A distinction is made between history and underlying structure: history is the detailed, concrete result of the abstract structure, the structure (language) is a collective, social representation, a social institution in and of itself (*sui generis*). Emphasis is placed on the underlying logic of the system as opposed to what actually happens in daily life.

The emphasis on culture-as-structure finds its roots in the later work of Durkheim. But, as Maryanski and Turner (1991) argue, the structuralists (and their intellectual offspring: post-structuralism, de-constructionism, and post-modernism) turned Durkheim on his head by neglecting the social-interactional source of language and culture.

The issues of where reality exists are ultimately metatheoretical and in the end represent assumptions upon which to theorize. In the long run, the value of the assumptions will be seen in the explanatory value of the resultant theories. In the short run, to argue over these issues may perhaps only lead to efforts that "wrangle about words, which is useless." At the same time, it is a risky undertaking to divorce from "empirical reality" our theoretical considerations (much like this paper). While I appreciate the importance postmodernism has given to cultural representations, my central criticism is directed at the assumption that a break has occurred between lived experience as reality and the symbols, rituals, and cultures that result from and inform/constrain daily interaction. Symbols are related to more than just other symbols in a field and to ideology; symbols are related to human interaction and social structure.

That humans are symbol consumers, that objects are consumed for their social worth not simply their use value, is not a new insight (Veblen 1899; Mead 1934). Due to the division of labor and to market forces, we are perhaps at a new height of abstraction in the symbols we use (Durkheim 1893/1984; Bernstein 1971; Collins 1990). It is my position that it is this abstraction that the postmodernists are concerned with. But abstraction does not necessarily lead to a break with material reality: people continue to use symbols and rituals to create and maintain self identity and group boundaries. In the final analysis, wearing a "Dockers outfit" only has meaning when it is compared to what others are wearing in an interaction. Dockers are part of a status set. Their position in the status set may be decoded if the Dockers clothes are simply placed next to 501's and a Hard Rock Cafe tee-shirt. And the postmodernists would be correct if that was as far as it went, advertisers comparing and contrasting potential symbols and projecting status positions upon them. But, in fact, humans that are different wear different clothes in real group interaction settings where self identities and group boundaries are created. It is this embedded interactional use that gives symbols meaning, emotion, and power. To divorce symbols from human-embedded-interaction and structure is like trying to understand clouds apart from the water cycle: there may be dragons out there but they don't have much of a relationship to what clouds are and do.

It may be, as postmodernists appear to argue, that commercialism has created signs and symbols that do not directly arise from interaction. It is also true that there are organizations and institutions that produce culture and symbols apart from the root of social interaction, e.g., education (Collins 1992). Goffman argues that the use of such symbols in group interaction could create a "thin and meager" conscious life for its members (1951:304).¹ It is this thin and meager conscious life that postmodernism has identified by claiming that the self is emotionally flat or without depth. Nevertheless, the question of whether groups are indeed using ill-suited symbols and whether the result is a thin and meager conscious life and to what degree this might be occurring remains to be resolved empirically by looking at groups and the exchange of symbols. Theoretically, commercialized symbols could be adopted exclusively by a group which would in turn invest the symbol with its own emotional energy leaving the conscious life and the self flat or without depth. Additionally, as Todd and Fisher (1988) argue, an exclusive focus on language (or culture) misses the possibility of reflexive theory, "...one in which social structure, social interaction, and the creation of consciousness are reflexively tied to language as it is used in everyday situations. In turn, language usage reflects and sustains these more structural aspects of social life" (6,7).

Goffman and the Fragmented Self

Goffman's work has been interpreted as a precursor to postmodernism sociology (Battershill 1990). Goffman certainly can be considered the theorist par excellence of the situated self. It is generally accepted that Goffman theorized a self that is created in an encounter: "The self... is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented..." (1959:252-253). In *Encounters* Goffman argues that a self awaits individuals in every situation and every situation is a multi-situated activity system. The concept of multi-situatedness is expanded in *Frame Analysis*.

Frame Analysis expands the concept of the definition of the situation found in *Encounters*. To conceive of an encounter as having only one definition misses the complexity that is there. Each actor may have several definitions of the situation working at the same time. Goffman's analogy is that of a picture frame. Every interaction is framed with a permeable barrier that includes and excludes certain things from the encounter. Frames may be keyed as a piece of music, the meaning of interaction may be changed from its common connotation to something else with all the participant's knowledge, or, frames may be fabricated, a single actor or team of actors may change the meaning of the frame without other's knowledge. Additionally, there are usually multiple and layered frames in an interaction. There is always one or more primary frames, based on the natural world or the social world, and there are generally one or more transformations occurring, either keyed or fabricated. Within each of these frames is potentially a situated-self. Goffman in his last major work indeed posits multiple-situational selves rather than a transsituational, core self.

This Goffmanian multiplicity of selves is the one that Collins (1988:255-259) has focused on. Using Goffman's approach, Collins argues that people play multiple and fleeting roles at any one given time and that those roles

may be played in double fashion, simultaneously enacting and distancing one's self from the role. Thus, multiple, fluctuating, and situational selves is normal. Collins argues that the image of a core self is a myth arising as the central sacred object of modern society, it is as unreal as the gods that Durkheim studied. The mythical self is created in the same way, they are symbols around which people have interacted and imbued with sacred emotions. It is a symbol reflecting the structure of society. "We are compelled to have an individual self, not because we actually have one but because social interaction requires us to act as if we do" (1988:256).

Nevertheless, there are hints in Goffman's writings that indicate Goffman himself had a concept of a self closer to Turner's (1988:44-46) use of the term "core self" and closer to what is popularly conceived of as the personality.

In *Stigma* (1963) Goffman proposes a three-fold typology of identity: the social identity, the personal identity, and the ego identity. The social identity is comprised of social categories imputed to the individual by self and others in defined situations. Each category has a complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of a particular category. The category and the attributes form anticipations in given social settings. These social settings establish the categories and attributes that are likely to be anticipated of an individual. People in an encounter lean on these anticipations, transform them into normative expectations and righteously presented demands.

A personal identity has more or less abiding characteristics that are a unique combination of life history events that come to be attached to an individual with the help of an identity peg, e.g. name or social security number. The personal identity plays a "...structured, routine, standardized role in social organization just because of its one-of-a-kind quality" (1963:57). The social and personal identities are primarily other persons' concerns and definitions regarding an individual. These concerns and identities are what Collins has termed reputations' cultural capital and circulates among people other than the individual (1988:361).

Thus far these selves are within the range of what Goffman generally talks about. It is the ego identity that hints at something else. The ego identity is "...first of all a subjective, reflexive matter that necessarily must be felt by the individual whose identity is at issue" (1963:106). This identity is of the individual's own construction and made out of the same materials which often use to construct a personal and social identity. The ego identity is that which "...distinguishes an individual from all others (and) is the core of his being, a general and central aspect of him, making him different through and through, not merely identifiably different, from those who are most like him" (1963:56). Goffman likens his ego identity to that of Erikson² and also refers to it as one's felt identity: "...the subjective sense of his own situation and his own continuity and character that an individual comes to obtain as a result of his various social experiences" (1963:105).

Stigma is not the only place that Goffman refers to the ego identity. In *The Presentation of Self*, there is a self that he refers to it as ego or personality. Goffman conceives of the ego self as one of three different levels of "social reality," each of which is affected by a performance gone awry, the other two levels are the social interaction and society. Social interaction is treated as a dialog between two teams and society as the colleague-groupings of the actor or larger establishments. The ego is seen as distinct from the particular part an actor may be playing. Goffman appears to conceptualize the ego as synonymous with the personality that is built around the individual's self conceptions.

In *Interaction Ritual* Goffman presents a two-fold image of self, the sacred self and self-as-player. The self-as-player is one who participates in a ritual game and performs honorably or dishonorably. Interaction is pictured as a ritual performance during which participants must present a face in keeping with approved social attributes. Interactants may be said to maintain face when the line he/she effectively takes is supported by the judgments of those present and is confirmed by evidence given through impersonal agencies. "At such times the person's face clearly is not lodged in or on his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter..." (1967:7).

On the other hand, the sacred self is an "...image pieced together from the expressive implications of the full flow of events in an undertaking..." (1967:31). This sacred self is the face that feelings become attached to. "If an encounter sustains an image of him that *he has long taken for granted*, he probably will have few feelings about the matter. If events establish a face for him that is better than he might have expected, he is likely to 'feel good'; if his ordinary expectations are not fulfilled, one expects that he will 'feel bad' or 'feel hurt'" (1967:6, emphasis added). The sacred self, like all sacred objects, has clear and unencroachable boundaries so that it is subject to "slights and profanation" (1967:31).

My purpose here is not to argue that Goffman had a clear, consistent concept of a core identity. On the contrary, Goffman's (1983) strict concern with the interaction order would preclude the core self as an interest. But, Goffman did acknowledge the ego identity as a social reality and conceptualized the sacred self as one that is transsituational and invested with ritualized emotion. It is the construction of this social reality and the process whereby it becomes ritually invested with emotional energy that I want to address.

Mead on the Social Construction of Self

For Mead, the essence of self is cognitive and lies in the internalized conversation of gestures. Mead notes that both Cooley and James argue the self is found in the reflexive affective experiences that make up self feeling. But, Mead argues, this affective argument does not account for the origin of the self or for the self feeling that is supposed to characterize these experiences: "the individual need not take the attitudes of others toward himself in these experiences... and he will not do so in these experiences unless his self has already originated otherwise..." (Mead 1934:173). The process whereby the self originates otherwise is the cognitive/linguistic development of the individual through role taking; the individual learns to distinguish self as one of the objects in the environment that must be taken into consideration for action.

In Meadian terms self is a linguistic object. As such, it ought to vary by the type of symbol system one is socialized in and uses frequently. Based on the work of Bernstein (1971), Douglas (1973), and Bourdieu (1984), I conceptualize this symbol system as a system of classification. This system of classification can vary from complex to simple. The more complex the individual's classification system, the more likely are the syntactical elements that are used to organize meaning to be extensive and complex. Individuals with a complex classification system will tend to see objects in terms of multiple levels of meaning and to classify them abstractly. This linguistic system brings sensitivity to the structure of an object, it is the learned ability to respond to an object in terms of its matrix of relationships. Individuals with this classification system will have a propensity to categorize and to abstract.

Conversely, the less complex an individual's classification system, the more likely the organizing syntactic elements will be of limited range. The simple classification system is characterized by a low order of abstractness and creates a sensitivity to the content of an object. An individual socialized in and using a simple classification system will have the learned ability to respond to the boundaries of an object rather than the matrix of relationships and inter-relationships in which it stands with other objects. An object will tend to be viewed in terms of its function rather than its form.

For one socialized to use a simple classification system, self will have a low order of abstractness and tend to be understood in terms of its boundaries and functions. The following propositions may be derived:

The greater an individual's socialization in and use of a low order classification system, the greater the tendency to understand an object in concrete terms and the greater the sensitivity to the boundaries and content of an object.

The greater the tendency to understand objects in concrete terms, boundaries, and content, the greater the tendency to perceive self as an obdurate reality with clear and definable boundaries.

The greater the tendency to perceive self as an obdurate reality with clear and definable boundaries, the more likely self will be experienced as core and transsituational.

For one socialized to use a complex classification system, self will tend to be understood as having abstract, multiple levels of meaning and will be understood in terms of its matrix of relationships, its situational selves.

The greater an individual's socialization in and use of a complex classification system, the greater the tendency to understand an object in abstract terms having multiple levels of meaning and the greater the sensitivity to the matrix of relationships and interrelationships of an object.

The greater the tendency to understand an object in abstract terms having multiple levels of meaning and the greater the sensitivity to the matrix of relationships and interrelationships of an object, the greater the tendency to perceive self as an abstracted concept in a matrix of relationships and inter-relationships.

The greater the tendency to perceive self as an abstracted concept in a matrix of relationships and inter-relationships, the more likely self will be experienced as fragmented and situational.

Durkheim on the Sacredness of Self

Durkheim's argument is based on the position that social life is impossible without the existence of some moral consciousness that is superior to the individual (Durkheim 1893/1984). In *The Division of Labor in Society* he argues that increased population size and ecological concentration leads to increased competition and increased differentiation within a society (Turner 1993). Increased differentiation tends to lead to societal disintegration unless an increasingly generalized value system is created. Marske (1987) argues that in the later part of his work Durkheim became convinced that the normative specificity of occupational groups by itself could not hold a society together. In order for society to function without pathology it requires more than the absence of anomie and egoism, it requires a new collective conscience. The values of that new collective conscience would be those values that center on the worth of the individual in the abstract. Thus, Durkheim's core generalized value for modern society is individualism, the new religion of humanity.

According to Durkheim (1915), symbols tend to vary by the degree of ritual investment: the greater a group's ritual performance around a symbol, the greater will be the symbol's sacredness, its emotional investment and meaningfulness. Rituals are fixed forms of communication. Collins (1988:250-259) clearly explicates the necessary elements of a ritual: people co-present and co-aware, with a common emotional mood and focus of attention, are able to invest emotional energy into common group symbols. The group symbol becomes whatever the interactants are focusing on during the interaction. Rituals may be formal, intentional ceremonies, or natural (Goffman 1967; Collins 1988:198). A natural ritual is any interaction with the necessary elements of a ritual. Much of what takes place in an interaction are natural rituals aimed at presenting and maintaining one's Goffmanian face (Goffman 1967:5-45).

Rituals may be performed in groups or in private. Private rituals are the result of focusing one's own attention and emotion on a group membership symbol. The group symbol still maintains its emotional and moral infusion from prior group interactions and may be used by an individual in private to recall and re-experience those interactions and emotion. A simple example of a private ritual is an individual in prayer or worship "centered on the Word of God." The Word of God having been sacredized and emotionally infused in public worship calls out the same response in the individual in private. Though Mead did not have a concept of the private ritual, he nonetheless touched on its possible effect. Conceptualized as occurring only in social activities, Mead postulated that the "I" and the "Me" could be fused: "It is where the 'I' and the 'me' can in some sense fuse that there arises the peculiar sense of exaltation which belongs to the religious and patriotic..." (1934:273). There is a strong sense of at-one-ment that occurs during intense interaction around a group symbol, at one with everyone present, but there is a corresponding at-one-ment that occurs in private rituals, at one with one's own self, the self being a sacredized group symbol. There is undoubtedly a time decay factor involved: the longer a

person and a symbol is away from the group interaction, the harder it will be to invoke the same level of emotionality in private.

Ritual density refers to the degree that an individual's encounters tend to be consistent with the same people in the same type of situations. As individuals interact repeatedly with a relatively small group of people over extended periods of time, their group symbols tend to become highly particular. Symbols that are highly particular tend to take on the characteristics of Durkheim's (1915) sacred symbols with clear boundaries and high amounts of invested emotion. Douglas (1973) refers to this result of high ritual density as ritualism: a belief in the efficacy of and sensitivity to instituted symbols. Low ritual density is in keeping with Collins' (1975) concept of cosmopolitanism and refers to diversity of communication occurring with diverse groups in various places.

Self is created through group interaction and may be understood as a type of group symbol (Mead 1934; Cooley 1902; Rosenberg 1981; Collins 1988). Thus:

In general,

The greater the complexity of differentiation within a society, the greater the tendency for that society to adopt individualism as a central value.

The greater the acceptance of individualism as a central value, the greater the tendency for the individual self to be recognized and valued.

The greater the tendency for the individual self to be recognized and valued, the greater the tendency for groups to define self as a type of group symbol.

Under these conditions:

The more an individual's interaction is restricted to situations of high ritual density, the greater the degree of ritualism.

The greater the ritualism in an individual's life, the greater the tendency to experience self as a sacred object invested with high emotionality and clear boundaries.

The greater the experience of self as sacred with high emotional investment, and clear boundaries, the greater the tendency to believe in and protect the boundaries defining self.

The greater the tendency to believe in and protect the boundaries defining self, the more likely self will be experienced as core and transsituational.

Conversely,

The more an individual's ritual density is cosmopolitan, the less the degree of ritualism.

The less the ritualism in an individual's life, the less the tendency to experience self as a sacred object invested with high emotional energy and clear boundaries.

The less the experience of self as a sacred object, with high emotional investment, and clear boundaries, the less the tendency to protect the boundaries defining self.

The less the tendency to protect the boundaries defining self, the more likely self will be experienced as fragmented and situational.

Both the ritual component and the linguistic component tend to vary by class position. Generally speaking, upper class parents tend to have higher education and to socialize their children around a complex classification system. Additionally, those of the upper classes are more likely to be cosmopolitan in their interaction networks. The above discussion has in mind arch-typical individuals: those raised and living in the upper or lower classes and not experiencing social mobility.

There is a large body of literature that privileges early socialization (e.g., Goodman, 1985; Heise 1972; Chodorow 1978; Kohn 1963; Belsky, Lemer, and Spanier 1984). Early socialization into a classification system and a ritual density network will create a disposition toward the effects of the system as they pertain to the self (see also Bernstein 1971; Bourdieu 1984, 1991). That is, if an individual's early socialization is around a low order classification system, the individual will tend to feel more comfortable understanding self as an obdurate reality with clear and definable boundaries even when socially mobile into more complex systems. The construction of the Meadian self-object occurs at an early age (Goodman 1985). As such, the type of symbol system used around the child will have weighted importance in later life. For those experiencing social mobility this phenomena may be viewed as part of a cultural lag (Goffman 1951:302). Another factor that may make the cultural lag more pronounced is the performance of private rituals. If an individual continues to perform private rituals, i.e. self talk, around self as a sacred object, then the experience of self will continue for a time to be as core and transsituational even when moving in more cosmopolitan and less ritualized networks.

While the ritual component and the linguistic component tend to vary together, they are conceptually and empirically separable. It is possible to be high on one component and low on the other. For example, a school teacher in a small midwestern town may have and use a complex classification scheme but have a relatively dense ritual network. The possibility of the components varying separately raises the possibility of conflictual forces in the construction of self. It has been my position throughout this paper that the actual interaction of social actors is fundamental. In the case of conflict, ritual density will produce a stronger force in the self-construction, particularly concerning the way one feels about one's self. But the ritual component does not obliterate the influence of the linguistic. The school teacher will feel pulled between two worlds, the world of the university and the world of the small midwestern town, and quite literally pulled between two selves. Considering the drive for self consistency (Turner 1988:43-44), it is most likely this type of conflict will not go unresolved.

Conclusion

To account for the possibility of a fragmented self it is not necessary to divorce symbols and culture from interaction as the postmodernists have done. The same social processes that have been able to account for the construction of the self in the past can explain a fragmented self. I have argued that the concept of a postmodern self that consists only of images is based on an assumption that divorces social interaction from the production of symbols. Culture and symbols may indeed be produced outside group interaction in two ways: by culture producing organizations and commercialization. But, I have argued, what those symbols mean to humans comes back to the question of how they are used in interaction. The postmodern critique of capitalism and the ever increasing production of symbolic media is well taken. But, the inferences of that critique must be worked out in a theory based in social interaction.

For example, following Durkheim, Warner (1959) argues that the division of labor brings greater complexity to the social system and increases the number of segmentary symbol systems (symbols created and ritualized around smaller group interactions). The greater the number and diversity of segmentary systems the greater the tendency (and need) of the integrative system (the symbol system shared by the society as a whole) to become more generalized and standardized. Both Warner and Halle (1984) have indicated that a society will increasingly use the education system and national holidays as focal points for integrative ritual production. Empirically this does not seem to be happening in the United States.

It can be argued that Durkheim and Warner's position is based on the assumption that groups are held together by the emotionality that symbols are imbued with. Thus, if the emotions surrounding segmentary systems are

more intense than the emotions surrounding the integrative system, then the social system is in danger of falling apart. But, theoretically there is another dynamic at work. Goffman (1951) and Collins (1992) argue that sub-group symbol systems can be circumvented. Symbols that arise in one group can be adopted by other groups. Goffman argues that diffusion can occur through curator groups and Collins argues that it can occur through formal culture producing organizations. According to Goffman, the effect of diffusion and using signs ill-suited for the group is that the psychic life of the individual and the group becomes thin and meager. This line of argument indicates that outside forces, curator groups and culture producing organizations, tend to circulate symbols between groups. This between group circulation could circumvent the ritual density needed to create strong affective group symbols. Ritual investment of emotion in a group symbol requires that a particular group interact with a particular symbol. When symbols are circulated between groups they lose the power to identify a particular group and groups will tend to not use them as identifiers and thus not invest them with emotion. What Goffman, and postmodernists, view as negative may be one of the dynamics that mitigates the Durkheim-Warner problem of segmentary systems and allows a post-industrial society to hold together. Durkheim's concern is that differentiated groups will tend to develop symbols that will, in the presence of a weak generalized system, increase conflict between groups and lead to the eventual disintegration of the larger society. But if the differentiated groups are unable to infuse symbols with high levels of emotionality, then the groups will be unable to mobilize conflict (Collins 1993). It is perhaps this lack of strongly infused symbol systems at both the societal level and the group level that allows a complex, postindustrial society to continue to exist.

I have also argued that the construction of self is a social construction. From Meadian and Durkheimian theory, I have maintained that whether self is experienced as a core, transsituational self or as a fragmented, situational self tends to depend on the type of linguistic system one is socialized in and uses and on one's ritual density. I am not arguing that the fragmented self does not exist but rather that it can be explained using existing sociological theory. Using the two components, we can generally know when to expect an individual to experience self as having clear boundaries or boundaries that are abstract and diffuse. Additionally, the experience of a fragmented self is not necessarily a general condition of all members in society but rather it is a condition that occurs only under certain conditions.

It would seem that even Denzin (1993) recognizes the linguistic and ritual dimensions necessary to experience a core self:

Action, character, poise, appearances, the icons of glamour and risk; these are the surface structures of a world out of touch with itself. The surface, superficial, postmodern self. Actors in this world cannot find themselves if they are confined solely to its linguistic systems. They must break out of these codes and find a deeper, more personal, private language, if they are to discover the self they seek. (1993:75)

ENDNOTES

- 1 Goffman's concern is with the symbols of class status. When there is consonance between the individual in an encounter using a status-sign and their status position, the individual experiences self-affirmation and group solidarity emerges as well as a depth in the psychic life of its members. If, as the result of the circulation of symbols, an individual uses a symbol ill-suited for his/her status-group, "...conscious life may become thin and meager, focused as it is upon symbols which are not particularly congenial to it" (Goffman 1951:304).
- 2 Whereas Freud's ego was the moderator between the id and the superego, Erikson placed emphasis on the ego rather than the id as a driving force in the human psyche. One result of this shift is the Erikson's actor appears more rational/logical than does the instinct-driven person according to Freud. Erikson conceived of the ego as using synthesizing methods to create and maintain a sense of "I", "...namely, a sense of being centered and active, whole and aware --and thus overcome a feeling of being peripheral or inactivated, fragmented, and 'obscured'" (Erikson 1982:86).

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