A CRITIQUE OF THE SYMBOLIC
INTERACTION OF EMOTIONS\(^1\)

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Introduction

George H. Mead placed emotions in the category of attitudes, as the nascent phase of an act. For Mead, human experience was understood through the analysis of conduct or action; he included emotions within this framework. Mead argued that physiological responses in the organism, especially in the central nervous system, must be viewed as part of the act. These responses were viewed as a dynamic process, not a static entity state. Emotions had a physiological component, in the viscera, in the neurological system, and in their bodily expression. This does not exempt them from a social psychological analysis, but in fact, requires such an analysis because physiological responses are action and part of the social act (1962:15-17).

Mead regarded Darwin's empirical work on the facial expression of emotions and the use of actors to investigate blood flow under emotional conditions as good research, but he disagreed with Darwin's interpretation of the data. Darwin assumed that emotions were states and that facial expressions were gestures whose purpose it was to express the emotion to others of the species. Mead's exception to Darwin was that countenance (facial expression) as the main form of expression of emotion was not a "meaningful", i.e. significant, gesture. Rather, it was a non-significant ges-
ture, which did not call out the same response in the individual expressing the emotion as it called out in the observer. It is possible for emotional expressions to become significant gestures, but when they do so, they cease to belong to the realm of emotions proper and become part of the reflective order of mind and self (1962: 15-17).

Mead's Themes

This treatment of emotion by Mead is one of four major themes on emotions in Mind, Self, and Society. The beginning of this introduction indicates disagreement with those who have suggested that emotions were not an area of investigation for Mead or that Mead simply repeated James' and Dewey's theories of emotion (Denzin, 1983; Falk, 1982).

The four major themes articulated by Mead are:

1) Emotions are physiological processes.

2) Emotions are different from emotional expressions. Emotional expressions are made primarily through countenance and vocal intonation, not verbalizations.

3) emotions and their expressions are not part of the reflective order of significant symbols. When emotions do become part of minded behavior, we need to distinguish them from our traditional definition of emotions.

4) Emotions differ during a person's life. A life span perspective is necessary to trace the develop-
ment of different emotions. Each of these themes will be brought to bear on arguments throughout the paper; they will serve as the underlying premises here.

Organization and Purpose

The paper is organized into four major sections: introductory comments, criticisms of current work, research recommendations based on new contributions, and a summary.

In the paper, the research of others is presented, which seems most suggestive for future endeavors and most relevant to the Meadian themes on emotions. In discussing these research efforts, certain trends will be criticized, which run counter to these underlying symbolic interaction (SI) principles.

Symbolic interactionists, or at least interactionists, are at the leading edge in the study of emotions. They have, however, presented an over-cognitive approach to the study of emotions. This is characterized by an emphasis on labeling, feeling rules, normative expectations, and in general, the symbolic as opposed to the interactional. Some interactionists have raised really old issues, which have been unwisely drug into this important new area (Kemper, 1981; Hochschild, 1983; Hunsaker, 1983 and Kemper, 1983). Also, there is a paucity of data on emotions. There are those who talk about emotions but never specify an emotion, such as love, grief, or depression. There seems little con-
cern for distinguishing between types of emotions, such as basic discrete, primary banal, and complex. These are general observations on the study of emotions. The major criticisms reflect upon conceptual problems.

**Major Criticisms**

**Emotions as Sensations**

The first criticism involves the notion, which is prevalent among some symbolic interactionists, that emotions are not specific bodily states (Shott, 1979). It would seem that some feel that the physiological bases for emotions must be discarded. Most frequently, these interactionists cite the study by Schachter and Singer (1962) as evidence that there is no connection between bodily states and emotions.

The first point regarding this issue is that SI can contribute to the study of emotions without ruling out physiology. The second point is that the assumption is unwarranted on empirical grounds. Kemper spends a great deal of time analyzing the Schachter and Singer study, and he effectively demonstrates that the design of the study was sociologically naive.

The anti-specificity experimenters are aware in only the most vague way of the relational nature of their experimental designs, thereby completely ignoring the quite obvious evidence for specificity in their own data. (1978:38)
Scheff (1979) also spends a significant proportion of his book analyzing the Schachter and Singer data and pointing out that Schachter and Singer's own findings do not support their conclusions.

My conclusion is that the subject's state of information, a peripheral variable, had a very weak effect on emotional state in both the anger and happiness condition, but that no effect was found for the second peripheral variable, the social environment. (1979:99)

As one reviews the neurophysiological literature, support can be found for the connection of emotions to the body and mind (Arnold, 1968; Glass, 1967; Pribram, 1967 and 1980; and Young, 1973).

The issue can be restated as follows. Some, such as James and Lange, have suggested that there are specific bodily reactions in the viscera and large muscles, which constitute the physiological aspect of emotional feeling. Others, such as Cannon, have stated that there is only a general physiological state of arousal, which is then interpreted by the brain as a specific emotion. This debate, sometimes referred to as the centralist-peripheralist debate, was a long one in the neurophysiological literature until the late 1960's. Then breakthroughs in the measurement of neurological phenomena made it evident that there
was no real debate at all, and both camps had part of the truth:

Recently the James-Lange and Cannon-Bard view have been superseded by one proposed by Papez and elaborated by MacLean. ... With the development of modern techniques for electrical brain stimulation, viscera were shown to be under the surveillance of the cerebral cortex. One part of this cortex—the limbic portion of the forebrain—came into focus for special attention. Papez suggested that the anatomical interconnections among limbic structures were ideally constituted to handle the long-lasting, intense aspects of experience that are usually associated with emotion. To this idea MacLean added the facts of the relationship between the limbic area and viscera, and suggested that here at last is the visceral brain—the seat of emotions. The persuasive power of this suggestion is great: Galen, James and Lange, Cannon and Bard, all are saved; visceral processes are the basis of emotion; an identifiable part of the brain is responsible for emotional control and experience because of its selective relations with viscera. James and Lange were wrong only in leaving out the brain; Cannon and Bard were wrong only in the part of the brain they had identified with emotion; the limbic forebrain,
not the thalamus, is the responsible agent. The path from "emotions in the vascular system" to "emotions in the forebrain" had finally been completed, and each step along the way freed us from preconceptions popularly current when the step was taken (Pribram, 1967:9-10).

Additionally, the work done on the facial expression of emotion points out that, at least, the basic discrete emotions are cross-culturally universal (Ekman, 1982:128-41), and perhaps many of these emotions are even cross-species (Darwin, 1965).

If the analyses provided by Kemper and Scheff do not resolve this issue, nor the work by neurophysiologists, then perhaps, the arguments of Mead may prevail. For Mead, emotions are physiological acts and as such are a natural part of human conduct. Emotions are like attitudes; that is, they are a preparatory phase of the act. Mead says we should accept physiological processes in general as part of the realm of human social action (1962, 20-21, 111).

Feelings versus Expressions

The real confusion about the physiological part of emotions may come from the failure to separate emotional feelings from emotional expressions, which is the second criticism. For Scheff, (1979) each non-complex or "unalloyed emotion" has a specific bodily tension state, i.e. a feel-
ing. Each emotional state, has a specific reflex expression of that emotion. These reflex expressions may be inhibited; socialized forms of expression may be substituted (1979:49-50). According to Scheff, the unfortunate situation is when the reflex is simply inhibited with no reconditioned response substituted. When the reflexes of expression are only inhibited through socialization, primarily through punishment, the emotional state or feeling becomes repressed; this leads to the problems of psychological dis-ease (1979:50-1). Scheff (1979:51) suggests that such repression also results in a more alienated and uncooperative society.

As a further example of this failure to distinguish between emotional feeling states and the expression of those feelings, one can cite SI writer's (e.g. Hochschild, 1979 and Shott, 1979) who often equate feelings, emotions, and sentiments, as though they were really the same things. Others hesitate to engage the problem of defining emotions.

Mead (1962) makes the point clear, emotions are physiological acts whose expression is primarily through countenance and vocal intonation. Mead proposes that we can understand the difference more clearly when we consider the theatrical actor. The actor is deliberately trying to communicate a particular emotion to the audience. To communicate that emotion, the actor will study and practice the expression of the emotion and call up that emotion in the self so that the expression calls up the same emotion in the
actor as in the audience. By contrast, when an individual experiences an emotion and that emotion is discharged through the gesture (1962: 17), the response of the other will not be the same as that of the individual (1962:15-17, 44-46, 49, 54, 56, 65 147-49, and 163). For example, one screams in rage at another to elicit fear in the other, not in one's self.

Emotions as Cognitions

The third criticism is the overly-cognitive view of humans. Almost every writer on emotions mentions the fact that in the past emotions were overlooked; the new interest in emotions is making an exciting breakthrough on this omission. "Bringing emotions back in" may be the new slogan, but emotions are treated as though they were the result of cognitions. Some of this occurs because emotions are dealt with as dependent variables and not as independent variables, but this is not the only reason. More fundamentally, the old ways of treating human beings as first and foremost thinking-intelligent-rational beings continues to lead the field away from human beings as emotional beings.

It is suggested here that the two major elements of human experience are feeling and thought, in action. What seems to be the opinion of many interactionists is that feelings always follow thoughts. From the point of view of child development, this seems inappropriate because the basic discrete emotions are all present by 24 months of age.
and some at birth (Malatesta, 1981:147 and Klinnert, et al. 1982:9). This period is equivalent to Piaget's sensorimotor stage, which is an early part of cognitive development, but is not what Mead recognized as thought. Thus from the point of view of genesis, emotions clearly precede thoughts.

Mead points out that for reflective intelligence, i.e. thought, to occur there must be a delay in action (1962:90), while emotions are often relatively immediate reactions to stimuli. Thought is the ability to delay reaction and select out of the environment those stimuli which are conducive to the act (1962:99, 117-19, 138, 173, 179fn). Characteristic of human self-conscious-minded behavior is that humans attend to stimuli and do not simply respond to them (1962:25). By contrast, emotions result from physiological sensitivities to the environment (1962: 129). Involuntary attention, like self-conscious attention, also delays action (1962:94-95); but it is externally imposed. Thus emotions are the result of a stopping of action or a conflict in action due to the environment or situation (1962:21).

The clinical literature points out that cognitions do not easily change emotions. As Scheff (1979:52) has said, and human experience suggests, when one is in the midst of an emotional state or feeling, our perceptions and our thoughts are not clear. The writings by Hochschild (1979), Scheff (1979), and Thoits (1983) on "emotion work" are
impressive in this area. It takes a great deal of mental effort to work on emotional feelings or states. From the clinical point of view, the therapy experience is time consuming; and as the data that Hochschild presents suggests, the effort to change emotions is not always successful (1979:565). We are probably more successful in altering the expression of emotions, but even this takes a great deal of effort. As Baldwin (1982) points out, the reconditioning of emotional responses requires extinction of the past response and a fairly consistent set of reinforcers to recondition the responses. Scheff (1979:34), in discussing the inhibition of emotional responses, points out that for emotional repression to occur it takes more than one occasion of punishment. It takes a series of occasions for a person's emotional response reflex to be extinguished.

Observations of parenting or conversations with parents quickly lead one to assess how difficult it is to deal with the emotional expressions of their children; to say nothing of their emotional states. Parents less frequently and directly deal with the emotional states and more frequently work on the inhibition or control of the emotional expression. Even then parents will spend years shaking, threatening, and cajoling the child into not crying and screaming. In many cases, what we want to tell the child is that a certain emotion is not called for in a particular situation. Rather than deal with the emotion, however, we deal with the
expression of the emotion. In effect we say: "it's OK to feel that way, just don't express it" rather than, "its OK to express that emotion, but you should not feel that way in this situation." The precedence suggested here is that emotions motivate thoughts, and thoughts are used to control emotional expression.

Cognitions may be the object which stimulates an emotion. That is, people do frequently feel an emotion about a cognition, but this is different from the argument that there is a general state of arousal which must be cognitively interpreted before there is a specific emotional feeling. Some (e.g. Roseman, 1983 and Sommers, 1981) have argued that emotions are cognitively produced. An example of this occurs when one analyzes the behavior of actors who will try to recall a situation in which they felt an emotion in order to re-create that feeling. In such situations, however, as Mead suggests, the cognitions are self-selected stimuli which call out the emotional state.

**Research Recommendations Based on New Contributions**

To date, symbolic interactionists or their close cousins have done almost, if not all, of the work in the sociology of emotions. Based on this work, suggestions will be offered on future directions for research.

**Interaction**

First, emotional feelings arise out of contact with the environment. Our contact with the environment, as human
beings, is almost exclusively the face-to-face interaction with significant others (Goffman 1983). This suggests that we need to study what kinds of interactions lead to what kinds of emotions. Kemper's work is most impressive in this direction (1978, 1981, 1982). Kemper begins with the proposition that: "an extremely large class of human emotions results from real, anticipated, imagined, or recollected outcomes of social relationships" (1978:9). The observational techniques of everyday life are well-suited to this type of investigation. As a starting point, Kemper has suggested that the interactions be characterized on the power-status dimensions; and in his most recent work (1982), he has added the dimension of agency. It is suggested here that the classes of emotions which will relate to these investigations are the basic discrete and the primary banal emotions which result from earlier interactions in childhood and adolescence.

Socialization

Second, if investigators accept the distinction between emotional feelings and emotional expressions, they can begin to explore how the expressions of emotions are socialized. This could provide significant contributions to the clinical community, where the kinds of socialization patterns that cause repression of emotional expression could be identified. Scheff's work has contributed to this area of investigation. As Scheff has pointed out, the repression of an
emotion does not occur through the single inhibition of an emotional response, rather a pattern of inhibitions must take place (1979:34). Scheff has also asserted that for every discrete emotion, which is a tension state in the body, there is a reflex of discharge or expression (1979:50). These reflex responses can be reconditioned using social learning theory (Baldwin, 1982). Thus with social learning theory, we have the beginning framework for classifying patterns of socialization.

From a developmental perspective, these first two areas of investigation will probably be most successful when conducted with children and adolescents. All of the discrete emotions, or "unalloyed emotions" as Scheff (1979:64) refers to them, such as love, grief, security, fear, anger, and boredom seem to develop during the first five or six years of life and then are modified through adolescence. By contrast, complex emotions, such as depression and loneliness, probably do not emerge before the age of eleven or so.

The socialization of feelings, i.e. emotions, is more likely to occur in adolescence and adulthood through increased differentiation. Research which identifies the various contexts and situations, in which this differentiation occurs, could provide important developmental information. For example, fear may become differentiated into bewilderment, confusion, and apprehension or anger into defiance and furor. The socialization of feelings may
involve the differentiation of intensity levels.

Sentiments

While interactionists can contribute to the above topics, an even stronger contribution can come from the analysis of complex adult emotions, when analyzed as transactions and when viewed as fundamentally changing or developing over the life span.

The work by Gordon (1981) provides the broadest and most thorough theoretical treatment on the concept of sentiments. Throughout the article, Gordon defines sentiment, each time with a slight variation, to emphasize the particular topic under consideration. Of these various statements the most universal is "sentiments ... a social process that combines sensations and gestures together with social relationships and beliefs to form discrete sentiments" (1981: 571).

Gordon's article has accounted for much of the major work in the sociology of emotions. It is, however, not a review article but rather an attempt to articulate his own position. It is not possible to review all of the ideas that are contained in this piece, and it is readily available for others. An emphasis on the above definition, however, seems appropriate.

Explicit in the definition is the distinction between bodily feelings (sensations) and emotional expressions (gestures). An emphasis is implied on interaction by social
relationships, as well as meaning and values by the use of the word 'beliefs'. These elements are placed together within the context of the social process. Each of these elements singly comprises the focus of separate authors. The suggestion, implied by this definition, is that all of these elements are necessary for understanding complex adult emotions.

There are, however, two disagreements between this paper and Gordon's view (Gordon, 1983). First, Gordon has chosen to define emotions as a general state of arousal. Because of this position, as Gordon explicitly states, he denies the existence of basic discrete emotions. Necessarily this position leads to a failure to consider the different levels and types of emotions argued for in this paper. Rather than equate discrete and primary emotions with sentiments, Gordon's position can be used to specify complex emotions as sentiments. Second, Gordon has not taken a life span developmental perspective although he does explicitly recognize its importance.

Transaction

The transactional view proposed by McCarthy (1982) on the importance of meaning probably holds the greatest potential for the analysis of complex emotions. Such a transactional view needs to incorporate the analysis of the interactions, as suggested above, and needs to focus more on the meanings attributed by the person. The least amount of
work has been done in this area, and the dimensions of this area are still vaguely defined. However, one could begin with the works of Franks (Franks, 1976, Thomas, et al. 1972, Franks and Seeburger, 1980, and Franks, 1982). His transactional view of power seems well-suited for the elaboration of the connection between Kemper and McCarthy. Franks's transactional view is similar to the work of Gibson (1982) on affordances in perception and the work of Mead on minded and habitual behavior (1938:6-8 and 68).

Emotions can become self-conscious (and thus sentiments) and their expression can become significant gestures when one can voluntarily delay reaction and action. This, for Mead, is one of the necessary conditions for all conduct involving significant gestures (1962:99, 117-19, 138, 173, 179fn). The environmental-situational conditions must have a sufficient distancing (1962:170). That is to say, "If our world were right on top of us, in contact with us, we would have no time for deliberation (1962:98fn)"; and thus the necessary condition for sentiments would not be present. Relevant to this point, Scheff (1979) makes an elaborate statement on the necessity of proper distancing for emotional catharsis.

For Mead, a great deal of human action is conducted without deliberation or self-consciousness (1962:43, 78-81, 91, 98). As differentiated from self-conscious sentiments, emotions as conscious feelings, arise specifically in those
situations where there is no deliberation; and yet action is delayed by \textit{the obdurate qualities of the situation} (Mead, 1962:21, 112, 122fn). Franks's contribution has been to define the obdurate qualities of social situations, namely power and status, and to imply emotional feelings as products.

This transactional view relates to emotions as self-conscious feelings, i.e. sentiments. For emotions to become self-conscious and socialized requires that the same conditions be met that are required for the development of self and mind. Mead suggests these involve memory and foresight (1962:100) and the triadic process for the development of meanings in gestures (1962:80). The triadic relationship is that which exists between the initial gesture, an adjusive response, and the resultant social act. The transactional view suggests how this development of meanings occurs when obdurate social and natural objects (others) refuse to make an adjusive response. This may be the reason why an unexpected majority of our labels for emotions are negative (Averill, 1980b). A transactional view in which the meanings of emotions emerge not through shared interaction but through transactions with obdurate others who suspend action may prove to be a valuable insight.

There seems to be a consensus among many of the writers in this area that complex emotions are relational in nature and involve the mixing of discrete emotions into complex
feeling states, such as depression and empathy (Averill, 1980a; Izard, 1972; and Plutchik, 1980). Relational means that the feelings are specifically about relationships. Mixing means the combination of internal bodily states of tension. These states may be felt more diffusely by the individual and call forth the thought process for interpretation. Because of this interpretational process, McCarthy's emphasis on meaning provides a research focus.

In addition to the importance of meaning in sentiments, it seems that sentiments have a judgmental or value component. For example, there seems to be a question of the kind: Depressed about what? Examples of the answers might be, depressed about: my relationship with a specific other, my clothes not being proper for a party, my relationship not being what I think a good relationship should be, or my own inability to make my relationship into the kind of relationship I consider good. These types of answers imply the application of values or value judgments (Falk and Hynes, 1980). A person is not likely to become depressed about things that are not important to him or her; what is important is likely to change over one's life span. Thus not only meanings but values also play a defining role in complex emotions.

In trying to distinguish types of love, Kemper (1982:10) makes a similar point. He suggests that in order to love someone that other must meet your internal stan-
dards. In that same paper, Kemper (1982:23-24) also refers to those who do morally correct things. He says one can distinguish between the types on the bases of whether or not they are doing things because they are rule bound or because of an authentic feeling. Thus the source of the standards or values are also important.

The transactional view, then, distinguishes between banal emotions, which result from external interactions, and sentiments, which involve self-conscious meanings and values.

Life Span Development

Mead may be thought of as a developmentalist, and there are suggestions in his work as to how the individual can evolve self-conscious meanings that are not rule bound nor community bound. An interpretation of life span development may be fashioned along the following lines.

Significant gestures, attitudes, meanings, and reflective intelligence emerge, change, and develop through the social process (Mead, 1962:p 79). While some emotional expressions may remain as non-significant gestures, there is a progression of emotions into the reflective realm just as there are with attitudes in general (Mead, 1962:p 158). From observing and taking the orientation of specific others toward emotional conduct, the individual gradually takes on a more generalized and organized set of emotional attitudes.
In adolescence, the individual "likes 'to belong'" (Mead, 1962:160), entering into and passing out of membership in many social organizations. Some of these organizations are temporary in nature, others more permanent. It is here that the individual develops a commitment to emotional orientations. As the individual becomes involved in more complex organizations and relations, "further differentiation, further evolution, further organization takes place" (Mead, 1962:164). Finally, some individuals are able to break away from their community and take on higher attitudes by attending to the voices of reason rather than attending to those members of immediate social groups (Mead, 1962:167-68).

As with all other attitudes—whether to self, others, objects, or sentiments—the individual may become more self-conscious and more reflectively thoughtful. Such reflectivity leads to higher degrees of authenticity (Mead, 1962:212), autonomy (Mead, 1962:214), and personal integration (Mead, 1962:218).

These points, exemplified by Mead, are important because they lead to an understanding of the life span developmental process and to more universalizable sentiments (Kant, 1956). They help clarify why we see differences between the discrete and complex emotions among different individuals at various stages of development.
There are types of emotion which have been called higher level emotions. Here the work of Kohlberg (1969) on moral reasoning, Kitchener and King (1981) on reflective judgment, Loevinger (1980) on ego development, and, most importantly, Dabrowski and Piechowski on adult emotional development (Dabrowski and Piechowski, 1977, Lysy and Piechowski, 1983, and Piechowski, 1975) become important. These theories have several features in common. First, they are life span developmental theories. They assume that development can take place throughout the life span of the individual.

They are also stage theories. As stage theories, they are not ontogenetic in their focus; an individual may remain at any stage. There is no necessary movement upward through the various stages. Since the stages are not assumed to be ontogenetic in nature, there is no specific relationship between stages and age. Once a person has moved into a stage, however, there is a destruction of the mode of operation at the lower stage. Also, within a stage all emotions (basic discrete and primary banal) look more alike than the same emotion does between stages. Thus, love is more like hate in a stage than love is like love between stages. This leads to an increase in individual differences, which is highly compatible with the SI tradition.

Since each of these stages constitutes fundamental differences in their organization, the ways in which the
discrete emotions are felt and expressed vary. Examining the various emotions and their expression at different levels of development may lead to significant new insights in our descriptions of the emotional experiences of life.

In the prior examples of depression, there are implied major differences in the emotional experiences. To be depressed about 'a specific relationship as experienced' is different from the depression felt 'because of one's own inability to form a relationship into a relationship one considers good'. The later requires an internalized self-object analysis and an evaluation of good.

For Mead, (1962) even the movement of societies toward his democratic ideal was based on the development of individuals toward further differentiation, authenticity, autonomy, and personal integration or toward higher levels of development.

Summary

In presenting Mead's four themes on emotion, criticizing certain current propositions, and offering future research directions, this paper presents five major principles. First, it is suggested that emotions are bodily tension states (feelings), and there are specific tensions (feelings) for specific discrete emotions.

Second, emotional feelings need to be separated from emotional expressions. Emotional feelings arise out of our interactions with the environment. Emotional expressions
are at first reflex responses to the bodily tensions. These reflexes are inhibited or reconditioned through the socialization process.

Third, there are different types of emotions. There are basic discrete emotions that develop early, perhaps by 24 months of age. There are banal primary emotions, which develop from childhood through adolescence. There are complex emotions, sentiments, which develop through late adolescence and adulthood. The discrete emotions develop primarily through the interaction of the person with his or her environment. This social environment is primarily significant others. Sentiments develop through a transactional process in which the meanings and values of the individual take on increased importance.

Fourth, we need to view human beings as emotional beings first. Discrete emotions, i.e. feelings, frequently structure cognitions while cognitions control emotional expression. Complex reflective emotions, sentiments, have longer periods of duration and are part of minded behavior. Emotion work, through cognition, can be brought to bear on emotions; but this occurs after the initial emotional reaction. Emotion work is difficult and frequently unsuccessful. A long overlooked order of precedence, in the analysis of human experience, is feeling and then thought, in action.

Finally, a life span developmental perspective should be pursued. This developmental perspective suggests an
individualized approach to the study of emotions. Individuals at different levels of emotional development will experience different types of emotional feeling and expression according to their level of development. Both the discrete and the complex emotions will be more alike within a level than the same emotion across levels.

These suggestions are compatible with the SI tradition, but more importantly, reflect a synthesis of the work already undertaken or suggested by interactionists.
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