

Chapter 9:

Cooley and Mead

Charles Horton Cooley
(1864-1929)

➤ Chair of sociology at the
University of Michigan

➤ PhD in economics

Cooley believed that society was in essence a "living whole", or organism, composed of differentiated members each of which has a special function.

This was precursor to the "functional" perspective or paradigm.

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Cooley furthered the development of the "functional" perspective by discussing how:

the separate roles of individuals in society work together to allow society to function successfully

Collins states: "As the separate individual is a myth, so is society an illusion when conceived of apart from individual members." (p.147) What does this mean? How can a "separate individual" be a myth?

An individual as we know it, cannot come into existence on its own (the separate individual). Cooley believed the individual is a combination of the socialization received and biological heredity.

Cooley wrote a book titled:
Human Nature and the Social Order
(a theory of the social self)

- A. How would you define human nature? (Does it relate to Durkheim's "Collective Conscience" or Freud's "Id"?)
- B. What do you see as the relationship between human nature and social order (e.g., does one support the other or vice versa)?

Cooley's Four Contributions:

1. the social "looking glass" self

First, we imagine how others see us (our appearance in the eyes of others)

Second, we imagine how they judge what they see (our behavior)

Third, we experience self-feeling (pride, mortification) based on our image of their judgment.

Thus, Cooley believed that we are the imaginations that we have of one another.

"I feel about me the way I think you think of me."

Society is the organic whole of which all imagining individuals are part.

2. Cooley introduced the idea of:

primary groups (family, close friends) and

secondary groups (impersonal groups such as professional associations, businesses)

3. Cooley introduced the idea of "sympathetic introspection" as a methodological tool (similar to Weber's Verstehen)

And what is Verstehen?

"sympathetic introspection" is putting oneself in the shoes of another

Review: What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of this method?

Review: How does it relate to qualitative vs quantitative methods?

Strength: provides valuable insights

Weakness: more speculative than empirical, difficult to test the accuracy of the insight
--not generalizable

4. Cooley identified three universal ideas of "right" behavior in a group.

What might some of these be?

1. loyalty to the group
2. kindness to group members
3. adherence to group customs

George Herbert Mead
(1863 - 1931)

- Son of a pastor
- Studied at Harvard
- Chair of philosophy at University of Chicago
- Did not publish major works but rather had students pull together his work

Mead's primary focus:

1. How to maintain social order while accomodating social change
2. How we become social "selves" in a changing world

1. Mead believed that the "invisible" hand of society does NOT solely determine who our social self will be.

This is contrary to Comte, Marx, Spencer or Cooley who believed that humans are controlled by society.

Mead believed that human kind is not merely a medium through which society's beliefs, values and norms are expressed through behavior.

Instead, the human being is an acting agent, organizing and determining one's own behavior, after taking into account the situation (i.e., free will).

Mead believed the Social Self has a "binary" nature rather than single

1. "me" represents an organized set of group attitudes learned from past encounters

2. "I" represents the present moment (spontaneity, creativity, "free will") and provides a response to others.

Social order is maintained by the "me" social self

Social change is instigated by the "I" social self

In other words, the "me" follows current traditions and the "I" allows one to introduce new ideas

This allows for free will and orderly social change.

The genius is one whose "me" follows the traditions like others but whose "I" is especially unique and original (e.g., Einstein, Buda)



Meads second major focus:
How the social self develops:

1. pre-play - unable to see self separately from others (infant)
2. play - role taking (young child)
3. game stage - Following rules. Anticipating the actions of others. The social self emerges (older child).

4. Generalized Other - able to relate to oneself according to the attitudes of the whole community (adult).

Somewhat parallels Durkheim's collective conscience and Freud's superego.

Example: United Nations trying to establish a "planetary" generalized other to settle disputes

Criticism of Mead:

1. Like Cooley, Mead was criticized because of the difficulty in operationalizing his concepts.
2. Mead ignored differences between people (e.g., social class)
3. Inability to test his theories

(Criticism of Mead)

4. doesn't account for power—how/why humans dominate and manipulate one another (Collin's conflict theory)

5. Ignored irrationality and the unconscious

The End

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