

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Scott, Susie. *Negotiating Identity: Symbolic Interactionist Approaches to Social Identity*. Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015. 268pp., \$29.95 paper (9780745669731)

In *Negotiating Identity: Symbolic Interactionist Approaches to Social Identity*, author Susie Scott utilizes symbolic interactionist and dramaturgical understandings of face-to-face encounters to explain how social identity is formed. Scott positions dramaturgy within the symbolic interactionist perspective while drawing on examples from phenomenology and ethnomethodology to outline the social processes of identity formation. For symbolic interactionists, identity is not a fixed position, rather it ebbs and flows through the social process of interaction with others. Scott contends that social identities are a complex process; reliant on the interaction order and negotiated throughout social life in relation to others (24). Using the role of language, the notion of role-making and Goffman's stigma, Scott is able to support her assertion that identities are processed, performed and pragmatic in nature (21). It is in this tradition that Scott's book is offered.

The book makes two important contributions: it adds to the existing knowledge base of social identity formation, and; it illustrates how the process and concepts of social identity formation are inextricably linked. Scott unpacks the role of language as a tool in identity performance, illustrates collaborative performances through the management of public nudity, explains self-presentation and impression management techniques when receiving exam results and the process of role-exit facilitated by others in the interaction order. The book is divided into the ways identities are "created, maintained, communicated, presented, negotiated, challenged, reproduced, reinvented and narrated" (21) with each chapter focusing on one or more key concepts.

Chapter 4, *Managing Faces: Roles, performance and self-presentation*, begins with Goffman's dramaturgical concept to explain the design and display of social roles. Scott emphasizes that identities change over the life course through the concept of career trajectory and provides an interesting case for shyness as deviant career. Explaining that shyness is often situational and involves interactional rule-breaking, like failing to take one's turn in conversation, Scott suggests that the shy identity

is normal and commonplace, yet dependant on future patterns of interaction (165). Scott builds on to the dramaturgical perspective on social roles to offer that shyness can, over time, become a master status.

Further, Scott suggests a third category of Goffman's "collective facework" using an example from an ethnographic study. In Chapter 5, *Casting Members: Teamwork, collusion and dramaturgical loyalty*, Rosling and Scott (2014) found collective "facesaving" techniques were employed when a team of competent professionals were grouped into an aerobics program for beginners as part of a sponsored work wellness program. The work colleagues displayed defensive strategies of regulating personal space between exercising bodies and protective strategies of deflecting blame for poor physical performance. Scott suggests that there is a collective social identity to which individuals subscribe and that the collective identity can be context specific.

In Chapter 7, *Reinventing Futures: Organizations, power and institutionalized identities*, Scott proposes a reinventive institution (RI) as an addition to Goffman's rendering of total institutions (TI) whereby individuals voluntarily "admit themselves (to the reinventive institution) in pursuit of self-improvement" (170). Scott provides the example of spiritual communities, secret fraternities and sororities or rehabilitation clinics; whereby voluntarily signing up for these institutions, agents are self-selecting the (re)creation of identity under the guise of self-improvement. Scott bridges Foucault's concept of surveillance with Goffman's interaction order to align institutional values and peer-surveillance to produce identity conformity processes within institutions. The chapter concludes by addressing performative regulation as yet another way of forming social identities within organizations.

An important contribution of this book is its excellent conceptual integration of chapters. For example, in Chapter 3, *Framing Pictures: Definitions, accounts and motive talk*, Scott first summarizes Sykes and Matza's (1957) work on how juvenile delinquents account for their criminal activities, stating that "instead of there being a subcultural group of 'deviants', there was a 'subculture of delinquency' into which anyone might drift" (71). She then links this idea back to Chapter 2, *Relating in Public: Rudeness, civility and polite fictions*, where she cites the model of rudeness as discussed in research on incivility in everyday life.

In the concluding chapter, *Faking Identity: Secrecy, deception and betrayal*, Scott addresses a less often examined aspect of social identity, highlighting the "devious ways in which actors present identities that are false, misleading or socially exploitative" (205). Scott suggests that symbolic interactionism brackets out the morality in the action and instead looks at what deception does for the interaction order (207). Scott

provides the example of telling lies, quoting from Meltzer (2003), where embedded in the career (lawyer, car sales) are “socially permissible fabrications” (224). Scott provides a solid case for the belief that deception can indeed strengthen social bonds, recognized for the social value and be socially good but is contingent on the relationship between the actors (208). The linking of concepts within the book clearly demonstrates the complexity of negotiating our identities in the social world.

A minor shortcoming of the book is its over emphasis on Goffman’s dramaturgy and interaction order; while rightly of importance, these concepts are cited extensively throughout the book beyond the chapter sections that were clearly devoted to them. Particularly as Goffman did not refer to himself as a symbolic interactionist and while many interactionists do claim him as one, others have shown how his dramaturgy diverges from the perspective (Gonos, 1977). With such attention paid to Goffman’s work, other equally important contributions from symbolic interactionist theorists such as Blumer (1969) and Stryker (1980) are given passive mention; this is problematic as the title of the book suggests a more extensive symbolic interactionist focus. Further, while including scholars not formally linked to the symbolic interactionist tradition allows for greater depth in understanding social identity more generally; the title of the book explicitly states that the author focuses on symbolic interactionist approaches. Including theoretical ideas from ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), phenomenology (Schutz, 1967) and dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959) blurs the lines of symbolic interactionist approaches to social identity and can be misleading to the reader. Scott does not always delineate which perspective is being used to support claims and to a new reader, that may be confusing. Nonetheless, the book would make a good addition to the libraries of upper year undergraduates, scholars new to social identity theory and those looking for an uncomplicated application of the work of Goffman’s dramaturgy specifically and the interaction order more generally.

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