6

Interpreting Actions

An action is a happening that you interpret as an actor doing something. Innumerable processes—like movements of galaxies—are not actions as long as no one interprets them as an actor doing something. On the other hand, some fake happenings get interpreted as real actions. Watching Hamlet hold up a skull and say, "Alas poor Yorick," you know that the actor is just pretending—that a real happening is not occurring, but you experience his speech as if he were a prince of Denmark and the skull were that of a court jester the prince once knew.

Your ability to interpret actions is built into the language you speak. Languages everywhere provide nouns and verbs that describe actions in noun-verb sentences (The child grinned) and noun-verb-noun sentences (The mother kissed the child). Your native language also may use additional nouns to specify where or when actions occur (The child played in the schoolyard), and other features of actions. The order of noun-verb combinations makes a difference when describing actions. Compare "The mother spanked the child," with "The child spanked the mother"!

Interpreting actions involves both cognitive processing and affective processing. A general rule governs both cases.

Humans try to experience what they already know.

On the cognitive side, this means that you try to fit any experience into cognitive categories acquired before the experience. The interpretation problem is figuring out which categories best fit the experience.

On the affective side, the general principle means that you try to match the feelings that the experience gives you with sentiments you acquired in the past. The interpretation problem is to choose the most sentiment-affirming interpretation among the alternatives that are available.

Clarifying terminology helps in understanding the interpretation of actions.

An *event* is any happening interpreted in terms of noun-verb combinations.

An *actor*, or agent, is an entity—like a human—that chooses to create events that fit perceived circumstances. Human actors are specified by identity-nouns.

A *behavior*, or act, describes something an actor does. Behaviors are specified by verbs.

An *object* is the target of an actor's behavior. This book deals only with objects who themselves are actors, so the objects also are specified by identity-nouns.

A *setting* is a place or time at which actions occur. Settings are specified by setting-nouns.

A *social action* is an event in which an actor behaves toward another actor who is in the role of object. The setting may or may not be mentioned when describing the action.

6.1 Action Frames

Actor, behavior, object, and setting define grammatical slots in "case grammar" of linguistic theory. A list of cultural elements specifies what can be substituted into each slot. The frame below shows the idea, with a sample of five elements that can be used in each slot. Of course, the English language actually provides hundreds of options for each slot. (Choices within square brackets show variations associated with other aspects of English grammar.)

[A / An]	adult / chatterbox / drunk / friend / moron	compliments / fights / hugs / insults / kids	[a / an]	adult / chatterbox / drunk / friend / moron	[at a / in a / during a]	ball game / bus / coffee break / festival / museum

The frame implies that you interpret social actions by selecting from culturally-given lists—a noun specifying the identity of the actor, a verb specifying the behavior, a noun specifying the identity of the object, a noun specifying the setting.

Usually you interpret actions after you have defined the situation, so you already know what the setting is, and what identities the actor and object have. Then the only issue is deciding what behavior describes the actor's activity.

Specifying the behavior is partly a perceptual matter. Suppose, for instance, that you see a man turn away from a woman and exit through a doorway. Your perceptions eliminate hundreds of possible behavior specifications—e.g., you are not witnessing a case of greeting, supervising, agreeing with, collaborating with, or pursuing. Some other interpretations—such as bartering, jesting, training, or play-acting—are conceivable with the understanding that the man is feigning his behavior. A behavior that naturally fits your sequence of perceptions is departing from, and therefore you may decide that the man is departing from the woman.

6.1.1 Institutional Coherence

Not every combination of identities, behaviors, and settings makes sense. Consider, for example, this one: The judge medicated the professor during Mass. Such a social action isn't impossible, but it is so bizarre that you would resist interpreting an action in those terms!

As a general rule, proper social actions do not mix identities, behaviors, and settings from different social institutions. That's what's wrong with the medicating action. Judge is an identity in the legal institution, medicating is a behavior in the medical institution, professor is an identity in the educational institution, and Mass is a setting in the religious institution. For comparison, consider this action in which identities, behavior, and setting all are from the legal institution: The judge sentenced the defendant in the courtroom. Much more comprehensible!

6.2 Affective Processing

Cognition doesn't completely determine interpretations of behavior because perceptions often fit a number of cognitive interpretations equally well.

For example, returning to the man-leaving-woman example, the cognitive frame that befits the act of departing-from also fits additional acts: abandon, leave, desert, escape-from, or flee. How do you decide which one of these behaviors happened in the scene? Did the man leave the woman, or abandon her? Maybe he was escaping her. Perhaps he fled from her. What actually happened?

Affect resolves ambiguities left by cognitive conceptualizations. Interpretation of your experiences has to be cognitively accurate, and affectively apropos as well. After you've fitted your perceptions to your cognitions as closely as possible, you complete the process of interpretation by fitting your immediate feelings to your pre-existing sentiments as much as possible.

6.2.1 Impression-Formation

You have feelings about an actor, behavior, object, and setting when a social action begins, and new affective meanings emerge as you discern the action.

For example, suppose you observe an employer in an office cheat an employee. Based on your sentiments, you may feel positive toward the employer, employee, and office to begin with, and feel that cheating someone is reprehensible. Seeing the employer cheat the employee makes the employer seem very bad. The event neutralizes the employee, too, as if you suspect that this individual might deserve victimization. The office no longer seems a positive place, now that you know that dishonest things happen there. Even the meaning of cheating changes a bit in the context of this event: it still seems bad but not as bad as usual, as if its wickedness gets bounded by the mundaneness of the workplace.

The affective meanings produced by an action apply in the context of that action in that place at that time. Discerning a new action involving the same individuals transforms affective meanings again, as you rework the affective meanings produced

by the last event. Consequently affective meanings produced by actions are short lived—transient.

Both pre-action feelings and the feelings emerging from the action have Evaluation, Potency, and Activity (EPA) components. A number of different mental processes transform the EPA values of pre-action feelings into EPA values of post-action feelings. The following sections discuss the most important processes discovered in impression-formation studies.

6.2.2 Stability

Impression formation always involves some stability. That is, your mind transfers some pre-action feeling toward an action element to the post-action feeling involving the same action element. For example, regardless of their behavior, you have a tendency to see actors as good after actions if the actors were good to begin with, and you tend to see actors as bad after actions if they were bad before the action.

In general, the goodness, powerfulness, and liveliness of actors, object persons, settings, and behaviors are stable to some degree.

6.2.3 Behavior Effects

A *morality effect* is one of the most important factors in impression formation. Evaluation of an actor's behavior influences how good or bad the actor seems after an action. For example, anyone helping another gets evaluative credit for engaging in a noble act. Anyone killing another is discredited for engaging in a horrific act.

Some of the potency of a behavior transfers to the actor, too. Actors seem more powerful when they engage in powerful behaviors.

Lively acts transfer activity back to the actor, and additionally make the actor seem more powerful; conversely quiet acts make the actor seem more inactive and powerless.

6.2.4 Object Diminishment

An individual loses potency merely by being the object of another’s behavior. For example, consider John kissed Mary, and Mary kissed John, which could be two ways of looking at the same event. Both Mary and John might well think of self as actor while kissing, because being the object of the other’s behavior makes one feel relatively weak and vulnerable.

Reduction of object potency is exacerbated when the actor’s behavior is potent, because behavior potency impacts on the object person opposite to the way it impacts on the actor—strong acts make the object seem weaker. This is especially true when there is inconsistency between the potency of the actor and the act—an impotent actor behaving potently toward an object person makes the object person seem especially vulnerable. Think how inadequate a father would feel if his ten-year-old had to instruct him on the proper way to greet her teacher.

6.2.5 Consistencies

Consistency effects relate feelings regarding the evaluation, potency, or activity of two different action elements.

Behavior-object evaluation consistency. An actor who performs a bad act on a good object person violates a consistency principle—that good objects require good treatment, and that bad objects require bad treatment—so the actor seems bad not only because of the morality effect but additionally because of behavior-object inconsistency on the evaluation dimension.

Behavior-object evaluation consistency affects the goodness-badness of the actor, object, and behavior in an action. That is, if the goodness-badness of the behavior matches the goodness-badness of the object person, then actor, object, and behavior all seem nicer. If the behavior is inconsistent with the goodness-badness of the object, then actor, object, and behavior all seem less good.

Thus, for example, politicians like to be seen hugging and kissing babies because hugging and kissing is good, yielding a morality effect, but also because babies are nice so hugging and kissing babies earns extra credit by performing an act that is evaluatively consistent with the object. On the other hand, a picture of a politician shaking hands with a gangster is a political faux pas for the politician because it shows a good act being done to a bad object.

Actor-behavior evaluative consistency. Another consistency principle is that actors should behave in accordance with the way they are evaluated; not doing so gets them discredited. For example, for a politician's admirers, his kissing a baby ordinarily enhances evaluations of the politician not only because of the morality effect and the behavior-object evaluative consistency, but because the act is consistent with their feelings about the actor. However, it works differently if you hate the politician. Then, his kissing babies seems totally out of character—even sinister—so the inconsistency cancels the positive impact of the behavior.

Impressions of a behavior also are influenced by this effect. A good behavior seems defiled when used by an evil actor, and a bad behavior seems more honorable when performed by a valued actor.

Actor-behavior potency consistency. Consistency between the potency of the actor and the potency of the behavior increases the apparent powerfulness of the object person, and decreases the apparent powerfulness of the actor. This principle is relevant mainly for a very powerful actor who wants to maintain an aura of power: such a person should not engage in extremely strong acts because such acts make the actor seem desperate, and the object person seem invincible. Instead, very strong actors must act in moderately potent ways that confirm their potency without bordering on desperation. (No distinctly weak interpersonal behaviors are available in most cultures to enter into this process.)

6.2.6 Congruencies

Congruency principles relate feelings on two different EPA dimensions regarding two different action elements. Two such effects are especially important in impression formation.

Behavior evaluation and object potency congruency. This combination affects evaluations of actors in the following ways.

Mercifulness. Behaving nicely to weak objects makes an actor seem good. (Still another reason that politicians kiss babies!)

Courageousness. Directing bad acts to strong objects makes an actor seem brave. (So politicians love to attack big government!)

Sycophancy. Directing nice acts to strong objects makes an actor seem bad, like a toady.

Ruthlessness. Directing abusive acts toward weak objects makes an actor seem evil.

Behavior potency and object evaluation congruency. Combinations of behavior potency with object evaluation also affect evaluations of actors. However, there are just two conditions since behavior potency ranges from powerful to not-powerful, never all the way to powerless.

Righteousness. Performing potent actions on evil people can make an actor seem upright.

Impertinence. Performing potent actions on cherished people can make an actor seem improperly bold.

6.2.7 Balance

Balance effects relate feelings on an EPA dimension regarding all three core action elements—actor, behavior, and object. The set of feelings is balanced if all three are positive, or if any two are negative. For example, actors seem extra good if an action combines a positive actor, a positive behavior, and a positive object person.

Evaluation balance. In effect, this balance effect enhances, or lessens, evaluation consistency effects. That is, this balance effect increases the actor-behavior consistency effect when the object is a good person, and diminishes it when the object is a bad person. Similarly, the importance of the behavior-object consistency effect increases when the actor is a good person, but declines when the actor is bad.

Potency balance. This balance effect works inversely on actor evaluations. Powerful individuals seem less good when they direct powerful behaviors at each other; and powerless individuals also seem less good when they direct powerful behaviors at each other. Powerful individuals seem nicer if they direct potent acts at weak others or if weak individuals direct potent actions at them. Similarly weak individuals seem nicer if they direct powerful acts at powerful others, or have powerful others acting potently toward them. Assume, for example, that a toddler is weak, a father is powerful, and kissing is a deep, potent act. Then, a toddler kissing her father makes both child and parent seem very sweet.

6.2.8 States of Being

Impression formation results from actions, as just discussed. Impressions also form from observations about an actor's state of being—e.g., the father is angry—and from assertions that imply an actor's state of being—e.g., the angry father disciplined

the child. States of being are identified by particularizing modifiers that refer to traits, biological characteristics, moral conditions, and moods.

Descriptions of states of being combine with an actor's identity to produce predictable outcomes, on all three EPA dimensions. The state of being generally has more impact on the outcome impression than the identity does. A consistency effect also operates on the evaluation dimension, such that good modifiers with good identities seem especially good.

6.2.9 Cross-Cultural Variations

Impression formation from social actions has been investigated in U.S., Canadian, and Japanese cultures. The major effects discussed above prevail in all three cultures, but some other relatively minor effects vary from one culture to another.

Impressions from assertions about states of being have been investigated in the U.S.A. and Japan, and a fair number of cultural variations have been found. For example, in Japanese culture, evaluation consistency between a state of being and identity is not so important in creating evaluation impressions as it is in U.S. culture, but potency consistency operates inversely in a significant way. That is, in Japan a potent actor in a potent state of being seems less good than the individual's identity suggests. For example, a sumo grand champion is quite esteemed in Japan, but a proud sumo grand champion is esteemed only slightly.

6.3 Impressions Versus Sentiments—Deflection

Likely actions create post-event impressions that match sentiments. An action that deflects impressions away from sentiments seems unlikely. Of course, any action deflects impressions away from sentiments to some degree, but the deflection is small in the case of likely actions and large in the case of unlikely actions.

For example, if you see a mother hugging her baby, the action creates impressions of mother and baby that probably are very close to your sentiments about mothers and babies. So this action seems likely, even to the point of being something you expect of mothers. On the other hand, seeing a physician ridicule a patient creates feelings that probably depart from your sentiments about physicians and patients, so this action seems unusual and unexpected. Occasionally an action wrenches your feelings very far from your sentiments, as in discovering that a mother murdered her baby; such an action makes the mother totally evil rather than nurturing, and this seems so unlikely that you have trouble believing such an action really happened. Similarly, experiencing a loved one dying creates an impression of the loved one very far from one's sentiment, and the event seems so impossible that the loved one may be conceived as still living, supernaturally.

Think of the distance between impression and sentiment as a quantity. If you add up the quantities for all of the elements in an event—actor, behavior, object, setting—you get a total called deflection. In general, the greater the deflection generated by an event, the less likely the event seems.

6.4 Identifying Behaviors

Mastering a language and learning its verbs gives you abundant cognitive frames to categorize sequences of perceived activity in culturally-standard ways. You do this very quickly, even though your language provides many hundreds of verbs.

Yet you often cannot make a final categorization on cognitive bases alone. Recalling the man-departing-from-woman example, the observed sequence of activity could fit a number of different interpretations: depart from, abandon, leave, desert, escape from, flee. You resolve the ambiguity affectively.

The behavior you finally choose to interpret a social action leads to impressions of the participants, to feelings about them. Within the constraints imposed by cognition, you choose the behavior that creates feelings that match your sentiments about the participants.

Thus, you may decide that the man abandoned the woman because that man is an enemy of yours. Or you may decide that the man fled the woman because earlier in the evening you identified that particular woman as an obnoxious drunk.

A complication that can arise is figuring out whether perceived activity is authentic—e.g., was the man just feigning leaving the woman? Most of the time you assume that settings are what they seem to be, people are who they say they are, and others' behaviors come from their hearts. However, the hypothesis of deception has to be considered now and then.

Another complication arises when you're in a group of people socially constructing an interpretation of an action. Different observers may forward different framings of what was perceived and debate with each other in order to arrive at a shared conception of what happened. For example, in the man-woman sequence, one observer may argue that the man and woman were not associated to begin with, in which case the interpretation of the man departing from the woman wouldn't be correct. Most of the time you assume that others have the same experiences as you, but now and then a check of that assumption reveals that it is not true, whereupon you and the others may work to achieve a consensual experience.

Social negotiations about the interpretation of actions are not strictly about cognitive matters. Emergent affective meanings change with different interpretations, so individuals also promote their own interpretation in order to confirm the sentiments invoked by their personal definitions of the situation.

6.5 Further Readings

Charles Fillmore presented a simple version of case grammar that still suffices for many social psychological analyses in his 1968 essay "The case for case." Fillmore and his colleagues now espouse frames, as surveyed in "FrameNet and Frame Semantics" (Fontenelle 2003).

The basic source on impression formation processes in English is the book, *Analyzing Social Interaction* (Smith-Lovin and Heise, 1988). Herman Smith and his colleagues have presented Japanese results in a series of articles (Smith 2002; Smith and Francis 2005; Smith, Matsuno and Ike 2001; Smith, Matsuno and Umino 1994).

7

Building Actions

Interpreting others' actions in familiar ways helps you experience life in terms of known categories and established sentiments. A still better way to have experiences affirming your knowledge and sentiments is to build events yourself. When you yourself are acting, you know what's happening, and your actions produce impressions that confirm your sentiments optimally.

Building an action requires filling the slots of a social action. Some key choices already are set by your definition of the situation—you know what setting you are in and what identities you and the other have. Your impetus to act implies that you are the actor and someone else is the object—the other person if you are interacting with one other individual. The remaining question is: What behavior should you perform?

7.1 Selecting a Behavior

Of all the behaviors you know—roughly speaking, all the verbs in your language—you immediately eliminate some because of your definition of the situation. A particular institution is implied by your recognition of the setting and the identities of those present. The acts associated with that institution are permissible, and unique acts of other institutions are not.

For example, if you are in an educational setting—say you're a professor with a student—then it is appropriate to perform the unique acts of the educational institution such as grading the student, or to perform acts that are appropriate in many institutions like advising, questioning, complimenting, admonishing, instructing, debating with, punishing, or sympathizing with the student. However, it is not appropriate to perform unique acts of other institutions, such as arresting, selling to, medicating, blessing, spanking, or making love to the student. A behavior that violates institutional boundaries constitutes a serious breach of ethics, if the behavior is not simply preposterous.

While your institutional context narrows the options, a great many acts still are left to choose from. How do you home in on the act that is right at the moment?

Affect does the work. Behaviors that best confirm your sentiments become psychologically available, and you select from this relatively small set the behavior that is most sensible in the circumstances.

Suppose, for example, that a father is on the brink of acting toward his son, and nothing has happened recently to create peculiar impressions of the two. Many behaviors are unthinkable because they would create impressions so remote from sentiments that the behaviors are emotionally and morally inconceivable. For instance, knife, make fun of, brutalize, molest, torture, choke, ridicule, whip, or scream at—none of these options even occurs to the father (assuming the father's sentiments are typically American) because such a behavior would deflect impressions of father and son far from sentiments.

Numerous less extreme behaviors also are out of mind for the father. A few instances are baby, tease, plead with, deride, silence, confine, argue with, criticize, or glower at. In normal circumstances, such options do not occur to the father because they transform impressions of self and other that are close to sentiments into impressions that deviate from sentiments. Engaging in such behaviors would create an action that feels anomalous and improbable.

Behaviors that are psychologically available to the father create impressions of father and son that are close to sentiments. Such behaviors include assist, explain something to, encourage, reason with, share something with, grin at, dine with, listen to, hug, compromise with, play with, or protect. These kinds of behaviors surface in the father's mind to spark initiation of his action.

Affective processing narrows the behavior options, perhaps to a dozen or so. What then determines the final selection? First, circumstances might instigate a logical sequence that selects one of the sentiment-confirming acts over others. For example, if the father perceives a threat to the son, then all other behavior options fade as the father moves directly into protecting his son. Second, a suggestion from someone else can elevate the imminence of an act. For example, watching a pre-school son trying to ride his first bike, a father might be tempted to encourage him, but mother's request—"Oh John, help him!"—elicits an act of assistance instead. Third, some sentiment-affirming actions might be eliminated from consideration because they are not feasible in the circumstances. The father cannot dine with his son if it no food is available, he cannot compromise with him if no request has been made, he cannot hug him if they are across the room from one another. Narrowed to just the feasible behaviors, the father might make his final selection arbitrarily—any institutionally-appropriate, feasible, and sentiment-affirming behavior is appropriate.

7.2 Social Interaction

When engaged in social interaction, you create actions that confirm the affective meanings of your own and others' identities. Other interactants in the situation operate the same way as you do, choosing actions that validate their sentiments about the identities they discern in the situation. Sequences of social interaction emerge as you

and other individuals act on each other, transforming impressions of yourselves, all trying to consummate their sentiments in their experiences.

Consider a simple example. You are with your sweetheart, and each of you sees self and other as a sweetheart. With these identities, you and the other can perform many validating behaviors with each other, such as court, laugh with, speak to, desire sexually, embrace, compliment, satisfy, kiss, fondle, amuse, welcome, play with, caress, defend, please, sleep with, interest, treat, warn, or cheer.

Suppose you compliment your sweetheart. The action provides you with a feeling of satisfaction, and it makes your sweetheart feel charmed or gleeful. In response, suppose your sweetheart kisses you, an act giving your sweetheart satisfaction, while leaving you feeling pleased, perhaps merry. Exchanging such acts back and forth validates the meaning of sweetheart for each of you, in that the impressions created of each person match the sentiment associated with the sweetheart identity. The acts additionally produce emotions associated with the sweetheart relationship.

Interactions are not always so straightforward. For example, negative acts within a relationship damage both individuals so neither can serve as a resource for the other to regain goodness. Instead the interactants have to repair their damaged selves through a series of actions that edge them back toward normality.

Suppose your sweetheart meets you for a date wearing a new pair of shoes. The shoes strike you as so outlandishly silly looking that you break out laughing as you stare at them. However, a glance upward reveals that your sweetheart's face has tightened into resentment, and you hear the words, "Done ridiculing me?" Your jaw drops as you realize that is exactly what you just did. Feeling awful, you sheepishly accept your sweetheart's lecture about fashion, or about attending to others' feelings, or the solemn forgiveness your sweetheart offers to you. Still feeling melancholy you offer your heartfelt assurance of love. After some poignant hugging, then some exultant kisses, the two of you finally get back to your normal sweetheart relationship! The initial negative act continues to affect impressions, behaviors, and emotions for several rounds of interaction.

Negative actions within a positive relationship generally occur because different interactants frame an action differently. That is the case above where one sweetheart laughs until the other sweetheart lets it be known that a laugh-at is what is happening, rather than laugh-with! Since others must interpret your actions, they may find a different meaning than you intended.

Another kind of complication in interaction arises when just one individual's identity has been invalidated, and the individual uses a relationship as a resource to repair the discombobulated self. Consider this example, which has been demonstrated in an experiment. Suppose you are a student taking a test, and the secretary administering the test interrupts you and demeans you for using a pen rather than a pencil to mark your answer sheet. When the secretary is gone, you grin at your friend taking the test with you, maybe even compliment some article of your friend’s clothing. Your behavior is unusually positive after depreciation by the secretary, whereas before you were satisfied just to sit with your friend, and chit-chat a bit. On the other hand, imagine the same scene where the other student in the room with you is awaiting a disciplinary conference in which he is likely to be expelled from school and even charged criminally. Now after the secretary berates you, you may glance at the

other, but overall you try to avoid interaction. In the first scene your friend is a resource for pulling your self-evaluation up, but in the second scene interacting with the deviant could only make impressions of yourself sink lower.

Additional complications in social interaction arise when one individual defines the situation differently than the others do, or when an individual defines the situation the same way as others do but has unshared sentiments about some of the salient identities. Examples of these kinds of predicament are given in later sections.

7.2.1 Groups

In a group of three or more individuals you can chose your partner for actions. Whenever feasible, you chose interaction partners so as to experience actions that maximally confirm your sentiments.

One surprising implication of this principle is that individuals with negative self-evaluation prefer to interact with others who criticize them, even though the derogations are emotionally painful! That is because being criticized is an experience that confirms a negative self-sentiment. On the other hand, individuals who have positive self-esteem prefer to be with others who appreciate them, since being appreciated is an experience that confirms a positive self-sentiment. Experiments have substantiated these outcomes among people with varying self-sentiments, who had to decide whether critics or appreciators would be their future interaction partners.

A similar principle explains how friendship cliques form in groups. Your identity in a group will be confirmed best by affiliating with people having compatible identities, and may be disconfirmed by affiliating with people with incompatible identities. Moreover, ideas also can be compatible or incompatible: your identity is confirmed by propounding ideas having an affective meaning that resonates with your identity, and your identity can be disconfirmed by touting ideas that do not fit it.

Accordingly, in a community of individuals whose identities have varying levels of evaluation and potency, we can expect a number of cliques to form, each with a preferred ideology. Individuals whose identities have high potency and positive evaluation will align together and support ideals like altruism, social progress, material success, or loyalty to authority. Another clique may form containing individuals with identities of medium potency and positive evaluation who support equalitarianism, emotional supportiveness, trust in others, or self-inquiry. Individuals with low potency identities may form a clique forwarding identification with the underprivileged, liberalism, rejection of authority and conformity, or rejection of material success. Another clique may form containing individuals with identities that are high potency and negatively evaluated, these individuals being devoted to tough-minded assertiveness, restraint, rugged individualism, isolationism, or self-sacrifice.

7.2.2 Avoiding Diminishment

Most people have high self-esteem and a sense of personal efficacy, which translates into their maintaining identities that are positively evaluated, with high potency. Maintaining potency of self creates a quandary when such people get together in interaction. Each wants to be the actor rather than the object in the next action, in

order to avoid object-diminishment during impression formation. But how can everyone be an actor and no one be an object? The predicament has a number of different resolutions.

One possibility is an interaction peppered with interruptions. You start a behavior like teaching the other something, and suddenly the other is congratulating you on a recent success, then trying to lead you toward something the other favors. You interrupt the other's maneuver by renewing your act of educating the other. And so on—each trying to substitute an action to confirm one's own potency before being diminished as the object of the other's action. Such interactions are invigorating while each individual perceives the self as dominating the process, but the interaction becomes frustrating and stressful for a party who gets overpowered.

A compromise solution to the predicament is provided by the sophisticated system of turn-taking offered within contemporary culture. Some actions require taking turns as part of their structure, such as questioning, requesting, or inviting. Beyond that, completion of any action opens the floor—to use the language of formal meetings, and at that point individuals other than the current actor get a chance to enact the next event. Turn-taking does not keep one from being diminished as the object of others' actions, but it does offer the opportunity for quick redress by taking the role of actor after diminishment.

Sometimes individuals are able to perform one action collaboratively. For example, as two friends regale themselves with their memory of some joint experience, they may unfold the story by passing the speaker role back and forth, sentences begun by one may be finished by the other, and some sentences may be spoken in chorus. Since both are performing the same general action, each produces the same potent impression of self. Of course, such improvisations work only when both individuals know their topic equally well and could perform the whole sequence alone, allowing them to contribute equally.

Multi-person routines in organizational settings provide the benefits of collaborative actions. In this case, individuals all have distinct roles, which they know by virtue of training, and the action they perform together requires the contributions of all. For example, an injured child delivered to a hospital emergency room initiates a bustle of activity by nurses and doctors in which each makes their standard contribution to a standard medical routine. Each individual reasonably views the self as actor in this event, and thus each enjoys the sense of potency of performing the overall action—that is, each nurse and doctor personally gets the fulfillment of saving the child.

7.3 Social Roles

Consider Jim.

- In his identity of physician, Jim medicates other people.
- In his identity of weekend football player, Jim tackles others.
- In his identity of lover, Jim kisses another individual.

You have to know Jim's identity in a given situation in order to know what behavior Jim might do next. You can predict behavior better if you also know the identities of

Jim's interaction partners and if you are aware of recent happenings. For example, Jim in his role of physician is more likely to medicate patients than to medicate nurses, and Jim is especially likely to medicate a patient after listening to the patient's complaints.

Each identity defines a different social role—a different set of likely behaviors. Roles are the functioning part of social institutions like medicine, law, family, religion, education, or commerce.

Roles within institutions often involve technical performances that require trained judgment and rationality, so you might think that affect has little relevance in understanding the behaviors of people acting in institutional roles. However, expressive actions grounded in affect are ubiquitous, and a great deal of institutional functioning is affect instigated.

Identities and behaviors in social institutions like medicine, law, and business have been shaped by institutional participants so that the actions required of institutional roles are actions that confirm affective meanings. Thus as participants act spontaneously on an affective basis, they produce actions that rationally contribute to instrumental goals. Following are some examples of how this works.

7.3.1 Medicine

Imagine that you are a doctor interacting with another doctor. You want to behave in a way that produces impressions of both parties that match the sentiment for doctor—quite good and potent and somewhat active. A congenial behavior is required to produce a good impression of both. Your behavior must be potent to affirm your own potency, but not so potent that it diminishes the potency of the other doctor. The activity of your act should approximately match the fundamental activity of doctors in order to produce a somewhat active impression of both individuals.

So what kinds of acts fit this profile, acknowledging that you do not want to perform a specialized behavior of some institution other than medicine? Some prime possibilities are answer, confer with, consult with, discuss something with, remind, show something to, or speak to. Any of these behaviors produces impressions of both parties that are quite close to the sentiment for a doctor.

Which behavior would you actually perform? Logic and rationality come into play at this point. You cannot answer the other if the other asked no question, you cannot remind the other if nothing is imminent, and you cannot show something if there is nothing notable to see. On the other hand, when the pre-condition for any one of these behaviors is fulfilled, then the behavior becomes highly motivated in a doctor-doctor interaction. For example, during an operation, you certainly will remind the other doctor to remove an overlooked sponge before suturing.

General behaviors like speaking-to have no specific pre-conditions, but they do require reasoning to implement. That is, your interaction partner will presume that anything you say makes sense if examined carefully enough, so you are obligated to speak in ways that do make sense. For example, as a doctor you cannot say "Sycamore trees" to another doctor if that relates to nothing in the situation or in your shared pasts. Your sanity would come into question if you did such things!

Other behaviors in a doctor-doctor interaction are eliminated by principles regarding the behavior's application. For example, injecting with medicine is an act in a doctor's toolkit that generally creates the proper impression of a doctor. However, doctors may inject patients only, so the act cannot be done to another doctor, unless the other loses the doctor identity and becomes a patient.

Continuing to imagine yourself as a doctor, consider your interaction with a nurse. Many behavior options are the same as with a doctor, but other behaviors that were in the background of a doctor-doctor interaction become salient in a doctor-nurse interaction, because sentiments about nurses are different from the doctor sentiment. For example, instructing the nurse comes to fore as an act that confirms both identities well and may meet functional demands. Friendly acts of flattery, comforting, or sympathizing also seem more appropriate in the doctor-nurse relationship.

The patient identity is less valued and less potent than the identities of doctor or nurse. Consequently as a doctor you can maintain the patient identity with acts that are less amiable and more potent than those used toward doctors and nurses, and this difference again changes the salience of behaviors within your doctor's toolkit. You may caution and warn a patient, or advise, appeal to, counsel, give instructions to, or suggest something to the patient. The options of medicating the patient or injecting the patient with medicine are prominent and sensible, as is putting the individual to bed. Of course, as doctor you continually must maintain the positivity of your doctor identity, so relatively authoritarian acts need to be interspersed with empathic acts of accommodating and excusing, agreeing with, apologizing to, chatting with, or soothing the patient.

Many behaviors toward a patient are completely out of mind for you as doctor, because they create impressions totally contrary to sentiments about doctors and patients. Acts of purposeful injury, hurt, and harm are so affectively inappropriate that their performance would seem immoral or insane, and, indeed, the Hippocratic Oath for physicians includes the vow never to do harm to anyone. Close behind in affectively inappropriate acts are belittling, cursing, degrading, insulting, ridiculing, screaming at, threatening, or tormenting. Such behaviors toward a patient are out mind for a doctor because they create such a bad impression of the actor, at odds with the sentiment that doctors are fundamentally good.

The patient as much as the doctor wants impressions to match sentiments, and for the most part that means taking a passive role in the relationship, letting the doctor maintain the high evaluation and potency of the doctor identity. If the patient does act, it must be with low potency behaviors that create impressions unthreatening to the doctor's authority—acts like obeying, minding, watching, or requesting something from.

7.3.2 Law

Consider sentiments about some key characters in a courtroom. A judge is good, very powerful, and a bit quiet. A lawyer is good, somewhat less potent than a judge, and active. A prosecuting attorney is not nice but not awful either, with potency between a judge's and lawyer's, and activity comparable to a lawyer's. A defendant

is slightly negative in evaluation, powerless, and a bit quiet. In relationship to a lawyer, though, a defendant has the identity of client, which is good, somewhat potent, and somewhat active.

Now consider how the sentiments for the identities order available acts in the legal toolkit of behaviors so as to constitute the role of each officer of the court when acting toward the defendant.

The judge has to create self-impressions of goodness, a high level of potency, and reserve, while maintaining the defendant's affectively-neutral sentiment. Passive observation of the defendant accomplishes this: observing, inspecting, glancing at, or looking at. Other possibilities include supervisory actions of quieting, addressing, briefing, or correcting the defendant. In appropriate circumstances, the judge might also excuse, comfort, apologize to, or exonerate the defendant.

The lawyer has to create impressions of self and client that are good, potent, and lively. Acts that do this include cuing, prompting, directing, or urging the client. Privately the lawyer can produce the right impressions by interviewing, questioning, challenging, or cautioning the client. For public display, the lawyer's sentiment-confirming acts include lauding, excusing, or exonerating the client.

To confirm sentiments about self and the defendant, the prosecuting attorney must create impressions that are non-positive in evaluation, with the prosecutor seeming powerful and lively while the defendant seems weak and passive. Acts of prosecuting and convicting the defendant accomplish this, as well as specific acts like commanding, confronting, cross-examining, disagreeing with, interrogating, rebuking, reproaching, or smirking at.

Recent events can change saliencies of acts. For example, suppose that an overwrought defendant defies a judge's direct order to remain seated. The defendant's action creates an impression of the judge as less good than a judge should be, and considerably less potent. The action also makes the defendant seem worse than a defendant should be, and insufficiently powerless and quiet. What can the judge to do to turn these anomalous impressions into impressions that better match sentiments about judges and defendants?

Because both judge and defendant have declined in goodness, the judge has to act less pleasantly than usual—any meliorative effects of acting nicely would be neutralized by the inconsistency of acting nicely toward this fractious defendant. Because the judge is below par in potency and the defendant seems too powerful, the judge must act forcefully in order to restore customary power relations. Additionally, the judge must avoid any freneticism in order to maintain the standard reserve of a judge.

These demands change the saliencies of acts for the judge with regard to the defendant. Now staring down, dissuading, or fining the defendant are prominent possibilities for the judge—acts that ordinarily are not salient. In response to the defendant's defiance, the judge also has more impetus to convict the defendant.

Thus, though the same acts generally are available to all officers of the court, the need of each party to maintain different sentiments about self and the defendant and to transform impressions created by recent events makes different sub-sets of acts salient for each participant, thereby defining the unique role of each court officer.

7.3.3 Work Roles

Suppose you are an employer and you see Jones as an employee, and Jones's definitions are parallel to yours. Sentiments associated with employer and employee are similar on evaluation and activity: both are good and somewhat active. However, the two identities differ in potency, with employer being quite powerful and employee being neither powerless nor powerful.

When acting toward Jones, you have to maintain the goodness and liveliness of both parties while producing impressions of yourself as very powerful and of Jones as non-powerful. Salient acts for you include supervisory acts like supervise, assist, guide, remind, direct, inform, explain something to, give instructions to, show something to, caution, or warn; fellowship acts like chat with, talk to, reassure, encourage, urge on, advise, accommodate, agree with, or flatter; and administrative acts like interview, employ, compensate, promise something to, confront, reason with, or negotiate with. These are the kinds of acts by which you produce impressions matching sentiments in this relationship.

When Jones acts toward you, the demands are the same—make both parties seem good and lively, while making you substantially more powerful than Jones. However, Jones acting puts you—the more powerful individual—in the object position, subject to object diminishment, so Jones has to forego acts that are too potent. Behaviors that produce the proper impressions include instrumental acts like serve, talk shop with, listen to, answer, ask about something, consult with, show something to, remind, or caution; and relational acts like chat with, jest with, console, agree with, exalt, confess to, apologize to, reassure; make up with, or compromise with.

Thus, when you both try to confirm sentiments about employer and employee, you and Jones perform normal workplace roles.

Now suppose you still see yourself as an employer, but you see Jones as a loafer. Jones, on the other hand, sees himself as an employee, but he sees you as a scrooge because you've put a lid on his salary in order to cut costs. These conflicting definitions of the situation introduce complications into interactions between the two of you.

You still have to produce impressions of yourself as good, very potent, and lively, but simultaneously your behavior has to create impressions of Jones that confirm him as a loafer—bad, weak, and very inactive. Acts that now become salient as best achieving this include observing, quieting, questioning, or dressing down Jones.

Suppose you make a point of observing Jones, and Jones—aware of your observation—responds. Jones feels inadequately appreciated by your action, yet at the same time Jones' impression of you does not seem nearly negative enough to him, since a scrooge is quite bad, impotent, and a bit inactive. Jones has to choose an act that will transform his current impressions into new impressions that are closer to the sentiments associated with employee and scrooge. Salient acts to accomplish this include prompting you about something, questioning you, sounding you out, or toadying up to you.

Say Jones prompts you. Having a loafer prompt you produces an impression of you that is insufficiently good and potent, and it makes Jones seem insufficiently bad, weak, and inactive. Now you have to do something to get back your dominance

and status, while pushing Jones back into his loafer character. The options are few and none of them are entirely effective. Quieting Jones is about the best you can do.

At that point Jones perceives that a scrooge has quieted an employee. Accordingly Jones feels increasingly devalued and diminished, and he sees you as increasingly distant from the venality and spinelessness appropriate to a scrooge. Among the acts that Jones might use to repair his perceived state of affairs are reproaching, admonishing, or rebuking you.

Jones reproaching you pushes you over the edge! That action creates impressions of Jones that are completely out of character for a loafer—insufficiently bad, weak, and lazy. The action also creates an impression of you as an employer that is far too deficient in goodness, power, and activity. You must convert those impressions to new impressions that are more in line with sentiments towards employers and loafers. Among the behaviors that come to your mind are disciplining Jones, even firing him.

In just such a way can unshared definitions of situations wreak havoc in work worlds, as individuals try to confirm their conflicting sentiments.

7.3.4 Macroactions

Individuals occupying institutional roles of authority often accomplish interpersonal actions through the participation of other people. For example, a professor grading student papers in a large class may examine no essays at all, but instead instigate reading and grading of essays by multiple teaching assistants. A business executive contracting with an official in another firm may talk on the telephone and provide a signature, but leave detailed paper work to aides and secretaries.

Macroactions are acts that are initiated by an actor but performed by someone else or by a social organization.

One difference between macroactions and individual behaviors is that macroactions may be more intricate than individual actions, because an organization can focus specialists within a division of labor on the behavioral goal. Another difference is that macroactions may span a longer period of time than individual actions, as individuals and sub-groups within the organization coordinate their work into a cumulative sequence that yields a final product. Thus interactions conducted via macroactions proceed slower and perhaps with more far reaching consequences than ordinary face-to-face interaction.

Yet the affective basis of interaction is the same with macroactions as with individual behaviors. Macroactions have sentiments attached to them; macroactions deployed in events generate impressions of actors and objects; and actors use macroactions to maintain the affective meanings of themselves and their interaction partners.

International relations involves macroaction exchanges. Representatives of a nation—presidents, prime ministers, ambassadors, etc.—take on their nation's identity in interchanges with representatives of other nations and select behaviors to affirm the sentiments attached to nation identities, or to repair impressions from events threatening those sentiments. Nations with positive mutual sentiments engage in

sustained cooperation, and nations that have negative sentiments in their relation with each other engage in persistent conflict.

Actions that are inconsistent with nation identities cause disconfirmation of sentiments, and such actions instigate new actions to repair the problem. Negative events between cooperative nations are redeemed quickly by some exceptionally positive action. Positive events between hostile nations quickly get nullified by some new outrage.

Such processes change mainly at turning points provided by elections, coups or other forms or regime change. However, the other party in the relationship has to accept that the relationship has changed, or else a turning point only leads to unshared definitions of the relationship, with each party struggling to affirm its own definition.

7.3.5 Informal Roles

Many of the interactions you have in everyday life do not involve institutional roles. You find yourself in generic identities that fit any situation—like man or woman, pal, or advisor—and you deal with others who also have such identities. You may not think of yourself as taking on negative identities, but you encounter other people who behave like a prude or a jerk or a party-pooper or a bully, etc., so informal negative identities are operative in your everyday life, too.

The goal of matching impressions to sentiments generates behaviors associated with informal roles as well as behaviors attached to institutional roles. For example, knowing that individuals try to confirm the sentiments of their identities, you expect buddies to be supportive of one another, bullies to be aggressive, novices to kid around, and jerks—well, you expect jerks will act like jerks. Advisors act sympathetic, loners show independence; and behaviors of party-poopers and fuddy-duddies exasperate those who are with them. Moreover, behavior constructed to confirm sentiments adjusts in plausible ways, depending on one's interaction partner: e.g., a man shows excitement and helpfulness with valued others; he is brusque and uncompromising with those he scorns. Predicted responses to deviance in informal relationships make sense, too. For example, an individual who gets caught lying to her roommate may cause the other to reproach her.

In general, as individuals act spontaneously on an affective basis in informal relationships, they produce actions that express and implement those relationships.

7.4 Deviance

What is deviant action? One answer is that deviance involves a behavior that is negatively evaluated.

Negatively evaluated behaviors include some despicable acts—e.g., lying to, stealing from, torturing, and murdering—but negative evaluation of behavior alone does not guarantee social deviance. Babbling to or glaring at someone are negatively evaluated, but they are not villainous. Moreover, some negatively evaluated behaviors are legitimate actions for normal actors in certain institutions. Judges are sup-

posed to convict, fine, and sentence; professors should flunk some people; police can properly arrest, confine, and interrogate suspects; those in charge of discipline are expected to punish and silence others. When these negatively-evaluated behaviors are directed at deviants, the actions are not deviant.

Deviance also has been interpreted as rare action, an idea that relates neatly to the issue of deflection. Deflection predicts the subjective likelihood of an event, and events that seem unlikely usually are fairly rare.

Most large-deflection actions combine a negatively evaluated behavior with positively valued actors or objects—e.g., the salesclerk cheated the child; the athlete raped the coed; the uncle beat his niece—and all such actions do seem very unlikely and deviant. So far, so good.

The trouble with this approach to defining deviance is that good actions performed by deviants—for example, a mugger helping a child—also deflect meanings and therefore must be deviant because they are unlikely actions. However, it doesn't really make sense to call good actions deviant, even if bad individuals perform them. Moreover, some positive behaviors, like God forgives the sinner, also produce moderate deflection. Individuals involved in such events may find such experiences extraordinary, but they do not ordinarily think of themselves as being involved in deviance.

Another problem is that villainous behavior among deviants does not generate much deflection: such actions seem likely. For example, a pimp punching a prostitute produces little deflection: that kind of behavior is expected from a pimp, and such a predicament is to be expected for a prostitute. Nevertheless the action would be deviant by most people's standards.

In 1964 U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart despaired at defining pornography objectively, but famously said “I know it when I see it.” Similarly, deviant actions cannot be defined objectively, but people know them when they see them. Constructionists flip this notion imaginatively, arguing that deviance comes into existence when people identify actions as deviant, especially people who have authority—like Supreme Court justices.

7.4.1 Interactions With Deviants

Foregoing the question of what constitutes deviant action, turn instead to the question of whether anything is special about interactions with deviants. For practical purposes, consider deviants to be individuals occupying negatively evaluated identities. This is not quite true, since some negatively evaluated identities are non-deviant (e.g., victim, slave). However, all deviants have negatively evaluated identities in the general culture.

Having a negative sentiment about an identity allows you to predict illicit actions and to sense risks intuitively. For example, knowing that muggers are bad, potent, and active, you expect them to bully, steal, rape, and kill, and you know you are in danger if a mugger is present.

When interacting with normal individuals, deviants validate their identities at the expense of the normal individuals, who are disconfirmed by the malevolent acts of the deviants.

For example, suppose a woman encounters a mugger. As soon as she realizes the other's identity, she expects unpleasant actions from him. At first she may not be intimidated, responding to his first approach by trying to dissuade him from harming her. Oddly this somewhat negative action of hers makes the mugger seem less villainous, and his response is to show his true vicious nature by threatening, pushing, attacking the woman. Sensing that the scene is getting out of hand, the woman now feels terrified. Yet despite her plummeting emotions, her behavioral inclinations continue to be valiant as she tries to maintain the strength and goodness of her identity as a woman. She still might try acts like persuading, exonerating, or converting the mugger. Such resolute behavior lets her feel more in control with emotions like indignation and scorn, even as she implicitly knows her action will trigger further aggressive behavior from the mugger.

On the other hand, the woman has the potential for re-casting herself as a victim. If she does so, her courage would be gone and her predicament in some ways worse! As a victim her behavior options are mainly begging and beseeching, while the mugger's options with a victim expand to a variety of violent and sexual acts. Curiously, even though the objective behavior expectations are worse in her role of victim, her emotions are mollified somewhat. Resigning herself to the role of victim replaces terror with anxiety, tenseness, and even anger.

Normal individuals cannot confirm themselves well in interactions with deviants. Even trying to do so emboldens the deviants to perform worse behaviors than usual.

7.4.2 Interactions Among Deviants

Cultural sentiments about deviants have evolved to make the characters predictable in their interactions with normal people. Normal people have no contact with the underworlds of deviance, and so they cannot adjust their sentiments in order to better predict the interactions of deviants among themselves. Nevertheless, our sentiments provide us with fantasies about what happens in deviant worlds. We easily imagine that deviants betray each other, frustrate each other, ridicule each other, exact vengeance on each other—plots like you see on television soap operas. Additionally we imagine that deviants often have positive emotions as they do these malevolent acts!

Our fantasies about deviants' interactions with each other are not always correct. Deviants sometimes get together in communities and normalize their sentiments about their deviant activities. The result is an unorthodox world from the standpoint of outsiders—a world where deviant people and actions are valued positively—as discussed in the chapter on sub-cultures.

However, some deviants do follow scripts provided by the general culture as they interact with one another. The key requirement is that the individuals are trying to maintain negative sentiments about themselves. More on this will follow in the chapter on selves.

7.5 Further Readings

The idea that actions are created to produce familiar experiences comes from William Powers, *Behavior: The Control of Perception* (1973). The impact of Powers' cybernetic model on sociology is surveyed in *Purpose, Meaning, and Action: Control Systems Theories in Sociology*, edited by Kent McClelland and Thomas Fararo (2006).

William Carter, Dawn Robinson, and Lynn Smith-Lovin (2006) showed that individuals act to protect both their own and others' identities, in their article "Restoring the challenged identity of others: Predicting restorative behaviors."

The experiment relating to responses during a test was conducted by Beverly Wiggins and is reported in *Analyzing Social Interactions* (Smith-Lovin and Heise,1988). An experiment showing that individuals prefer to interact with others who confirm their identities, even if the experiences are emotionally painful, was conducted by Dawn Robinson and Lynn Smith-Lovin, and reported in their 1992 article, "Selective interaction as a strategy for identity maintenance: An affect control model."

Dawn Robinson argued that cliques emerge from identity confirmation in her 1996 article, "Identity and friendship: Affective dynamics and network formation." Robert Freed Bales related self-sentiment types with ideological positions in various books, such as *Social Interaction Systems: Theory and Measurement* (1999).

Smith-Lovin and Robinson (1992) provided a detailed discussion of conversational tactics in their book chapter, "Gender and conversational dynamics."

Workplace conflicts caused by disparate sentiments have been discussed by Andreas Schneider (2002a) in his article, "Computer simulation of behavior prescriptions in multi-cultural corporations," and by Herman Smith in "Predicting stress in American-Japanese business relations" (Smith 1995).

The concept of macroaction was developed by Alex Durig and myself (Heise and Durig 1997) in "A frame for organizational actions and macroactions." Affective control of inter-nation macroactions was analyzed by Steven Lerner and myself (Heise and Lerner 2006) in "Affect control in international interactions." I reported additional analyses of international relations in "Sentiment formation in social interaction" (Heise 2006).