

# Social Action Theory (Aka Interpretivism)

## Intro

Ground up approach to explaining social change/ social structures

individual motives for acting, individuals' own explanation of why they do what they do

How people see themselves (self-concept) and others

We need to understand...

We need a micro 'day to day' approach which focuses on interactions

Dramaturgical theory

Labelling theory

Critical response to Positivism

Some action theorists believe there is no objective social structure

Stats are socially constructed

We need 'Verstehen' - observation isn't enough

We need to understand motives to understand structural change

Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism

Weber

People interpret the same symbols in many different ways

The looking glass self

Developed through thinking about how others see us - developed by labelling theory

We actively act out roles, we don't just passively accept them - critiques Functionalism

Involves taking on the role of the other - this is complex - developed by Goffman

Material deprivation seems to have real and negative effects on people's life-chances

People are 'less free' if they are working class

Most social action theory can't explain the depressing predictability of most human behaviour

And we need These structures to be free

Giddens - structures still exist in the form of abstract systems

If people are so active, why do so many people choose to be so tediously normal?

Social action approaches are too focused on individuals. It doesn't pay enough attention to structure

## Overall evaluations

### Negative

### Positive

## Symbolic Interactionism - 4 key ideas

The symbol

The self/ self concept

Game playing and role taking

The interaction

## Dramaturgical Theory

People are actors on a stage, acting out social roles

Impression management

Some performances are sincere, some contrived

Front Stage and back stage

Labelling theory seems to be useful in explaining school exclusions and stop and search rates

E.g. Paul Willis

On the side of the marginalised/ powerless

Micro-approaches can help us avoid misunderstanding/ appreciate diversity

Might be more relevant in today's diverse post-modern age

E.g. The personal life perspective on the family

It's useful for teachers to understand how pupils perceive school to help explain and deal with rebellious pupils

Same action, different interpretations, many meanings, different significances

## Labelling theory

Criticised for being deterministic

The same actions have different meanings

Humans are conscious actors

They interpret the same social phenomena in different ways

The labels people give to others influences their self-concepts

Positive or negative labels can result in a self-fulfilling prophecy

Becker applied to education - working class kids more likely to be labelled as failures

Becker also applied to deviance - labelling by the authorities can lead to a deviant career and master status