1.4 Interactionism and the Social Construction of the Self: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Where a question refers to Item F, use both the Item and your own knowledge of interactionist ideas in your answer.

1 Evaluate the view that a person's sense of self is mainly shaped by how they interact with other people, rather than by fixed personal traits. In your answer you should refer to more than one interactionist thinker.

(Total for Question 1 is 12 marks)

2 Explain two reasons Goffman's 'back stage' setting might feel more comfortable than a 'front stage' setting.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 George Herbert Mead argued that a sense of self develops through a specific process. Explain Mead's account of how a sense of self develops.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Mead also distinguished between two parts of the self, which he called the 'I' and the 'me'. Explain Mead's distinction between the 'I' and the 'me'.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 State one criticism that is often made of Goffman's dramaturgical approach.

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

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Mark scheme · 1.4 Interactionism and the Social Construction of the Self: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

Level 4 A detailed, well-balanced evaluation that accurately explains at least two interactionist accounts (Mead, Cooley and/or Goffman) of how the self is shaped through interaction, supported by accurate reference to named sociologists. Strengths and weaknesses of the interactionist view are analysed, and a reasoned, supported judgement is reached. Sociological terminology is used accurately and consistently throughout.	**10-12**
Level 3 A clear evaluation that explains at least two interactionist accounts, with some accurate reference to named sociologists. Some analysis of strengths/weaknesses. An attempt at a conclusion, which may be only partly supported.	**7-9**
Level 2 Some relevant explanation of one or more interactionist accounts, with limited development or accuracy. Little clear evaluation.	**4-6**
Level 1 One or two isolated, undeveloped points about the self or interaction, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail.	**1-3**
Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**

Indicative content:

- Mead's case: the self develops through role-taking and eventually responding to the 'generalised other', with the 'I' and 'me' explaining both social conformity and individual creativity.
- Cooley's case: the looking-glass self shows how self-image forms from imagining others' judgements, so the self is a reflection built through interaction rather than something fixed from birth.
- Goffman's case: the dramaturgical approach shows the self is presented differently in different settings (front stage/back stage), such as Deniz's contrasting lesson and lunchtime behaviour in Item F, suggesting there may be no single, fixed self at all.
- Evaluation for the interactionist view: these accounts fit everyday observation that people behave differently in different social contexts, and give a detailed, close-up account of how identity is actively built rather than simply given.
- Evaluation against the interactionist view: critics argue these accounts focus on individual interaction and can neglect wider structural forces (class, patriarchy, ethnicity) that also shape identity, which functionalist, Marxist and feminist perspectives emphasise instead.
- Further evaluation: critics of Goffman specifically argue treating all behaviour as 'performance' may overstate how calculated everyday behaviour really is; some interaction may reflect a more stable underlying self than the dramaturgical model implies.
- A balanced conclusion might argue that interaction clearly shapes how the self is expressed and experienced day-to-day, while acknowledging that wider social structures may still set the deeper limits within which that interaction takes place.
- A convincing top-level answer compares at least two named thinkers directly, rather than describing each in isolation, and uses a specific example (such as Item F) to illustrate the argument.

Question 2

one reason, e.g. back stage there is no wider audience whose judgement needs managing	**B1**
development of that reason, e.g. so a person does not need to keep up continuous impression management	**B1**
a second, different reason, e.g. back stage settings often involve people, such as close friends, who already know and accept the person	**B1**
development of that reason, e.g. so there is less risk that relaxed or informal behaviour will damage how the person is seen	**B1**

Answer: Back stage can feel more comfortable because there is no wider audience to manage an impression for, and because it usually involves people, such as close friends, who already know and accept the person, so relaxed behaviour carries less risk to how they are seen.

Question 3

identifies 'role-taking' (or 'taking the role of the other') as the process by which a child imagines how they appear from another person's point of view	**B1**
development, e.g. Mead argued children first take on the roles of significant individuals, such as a parent, in play	**B1**
identifies the 'generalised other' as the shared attitudes and expectations of society as a whole, which a person eventually learns to imagine and respond to	**B1**
development, e.g. once a person can respond to the generalised other, they can act appropriately even in situations involving people they have never met	**B1**

Answer: Mead argued a sense of self develops through 'role-taking', imagining how one appears to others, beginning with significant individuals in play; a person eventually learns to imagine the 'generalised other', the shared expectations of society as a whole, allowing them to act appropriately even among strangers.

Question 4

identifies the 'me' as the socialised part of the self, made up of the attitudes and expectations of others that a person has internalised	**B1**
development, e.g. the 'me' is what allows a person to act in ways that fit with social expectations	**B1**
identifies the 'I' as the spontaneous, creative, individual part of the self that responds to the 'me' but is not fully determined by it	**B1**
development, e.g. the interaction between the 'I' and the 'me' explains how individuals can be both shaped by society and capable of original, unpredictable action	**B1**

Answer: Mead's 'me' is the socialised part of the self made up of internalised social expectations, while the 'I' is the spontaneous, creative part that responds to the 'me' without being fully determined by it; together they explain how a person can be both shaped by society and capable of original action.

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Question 5

identifies a genuine criticism, e.g. critics argue that describing all social behaviour as 'performance' can make people seem insincere or calculating, when much everyday behaviour may feel natural and unplanned rather than deliberately managed **B1**

brief development, e.g. or that the approach focuses heavily on individual interaction and gives less attention to wider social structures such as class or power **B1**

Answer: Critics argue that describing all social behaviour as 'performance' can make people seem insincere or calculating, when much everyday behaviour may feel natural rather than deliberately managed, and that the approach gives less attention to wider social structures such as class or power.

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