

## **Introduction to Dr. Jacki Fitzpatrick's Symbolic Interactionism (SI) Activity: Application Suggestions for Close Relationships Courses**

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In the following article, Dr. Jacki Fitzpatrick provides a formal description of a classroom activity she designed to illustrate Symbolic Interactionism (SI) in a Family Theory Course. In preparation for engaging in the SI activity, graduate students read a set of articles (such as those suggested below). In an undergraduate course, students read a textbook chapter outlining SI theory. In personal correspondence with a member of the IARR teaching committee, Dr. Fitzpatrick stated "In the early years of teaching SI theory, I found that students often struggled to comprehend the concepts simply from the readings or lecture. So, I recognized that I would need a teaching activity. I looked at teaching literature, but didn't find any descriptions of activities which quite fit my needs. The doing SI activity is the result of my efforts" (personal communication, May 22, 2017).

The theory of symbolic interactionism relates to the creation of shared meaning in relationships. Fitzpatrick's SI activity could be applied in a close relationships class to demonstrate how the meaning imposed upon perceptions of partner behavior impacts the interpretation of intentions attributed to the partner (such as, in conflict situations). Classroom discussion following the SI exercise might highlight how the relationship context and the emotional/psychological state of the individuals in that relationship might influence reactions the moment meaning is imposed upon a partner's behavior. Classroom discussion might further note that communication allows partners to discuss and clarify meaning. As such, this activity would work to illustrate the shared meanings that couples develop within their relationship.

**Fitzpatrick, J. (2016). Doing symbolic interactionism: Engaging students to foster comprehension of theoretical concepts/principles. *Family Science Review*, 21, 90-100. [http://www.familyscienceassociation.org/sites/default/files/15-80%20Fitzpatrick.final\\_.pdf](http://www.familyscienceassociation.org/sites/default/files/15-80%20Fitzpatrick.final_.pdf)**

*Suggested readings for graduate students prior to engaging in the SI activity described above:*

LaRossa, R. & Reitzes, D. (1993). Symbolic interactionism and family studies. In P. Boss, W. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W. Schumm, & S. Steinmetz (Eds.), *Sourcebook of family theories and methods: A contextual approach* (pp. 135-163). New York: Plenum Press.

Snow, D. (2001). Extending and broadening Blumer's conceptualization of symbolic interactionism. *Symbolic Interaction*, 24, 367-377.

Hollingsworth, L. (1999). Symbolic interactionism, African American families, and the transracial adoption controversy. *Social Work*, 44, 443-453.

Ugalde, A., Krishnasamy, M. & Schofield, P. (2012). Role recognition and changes to self-identity in family caregivers of people with advanced cancer: A qualitative study. *Supportive Care in Cancer*, 20, 1175-1181.