

Agency at Work: A Dynamic Interpretive Approach

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ABSTRACT

Roy' s 1950s paper " Banana Time" is used as the basis for an exploration of the nature and relationship of agency and action. Roy' s activity in playing his " game of work" is shown to be a feature of individual conduct that, despite possessing subjective meaning, is largely neglected by contemporary sociologists, mainly because of its covert character. What an examination of this aspect of his conduct suggests is the need to revise the conventional observational approach to the definition of the unit act by recognising that there may well be an additional actor' s covert definition sitting within the accepted social definition and that it is therefore necessary to use the criterion of attentionality to identify the unit act. An analysis of Roy' s game of work also helps to shed light on the possible relationship between action and agency, revealing that while the power of agency enables individuals to act, it is also frequently necessary for individuals to act in order to maintain or restore their power of agency. Finally, a consideration of the function fulfilled by Roy' s game of work shows that a behaviourist-style stimulus-response analysis of conduct is not at odds either with voluntarism or the adoption of the actor' s standpoint. This is because Roy demonstrates how actors are themselves lay behaviourists, fully aware of how they need to manipulate stimuli in order to produce desired responses in themselves.

KEYWORDS

Agency; Definition of Action; Covert Action; Dynamic Interpretivism

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