In his articles, John Baldwin discusses Mead's contribution to sociology and his many ideas about a person in relation to its society. In Language and Intelligence, Baldwin talks about Mead's idea that gestures can be predictors of events or actions that will follow and that it is thanks to language that humans have the ability to have internal and external conversations. Mead also believed that many distinctive characteristics of human behavior are due to our ability to speak languages. In Self and Society, Baldwin discusses Mead's thoughts that the self arises through a child's interaction with society, and that the self is continuously changing due to influences from relations with others.

In his chapter about the self and society, Baldwin explains that Mead divided the self into the ?I? and the ?me.? He gives example of their differences, for instance, that the ?I? is a subject and a source of spontaneity and creativity, while the ?me? is an object and related to the reflective self, setting limits on actions. The section in Baldwin's article about the differences between the ?me? and the ?I? is puzzling to me; I am a little confused about some of the ways in which the differences between the two parts of the self are explained. For example, why does an attempt to observe the ?I? result in a revealing of the ?me?? I also don?t understand why the self cannot appear in the consciousness as an ?I.?. Did Mead do any studies on which to base this division he has made of the self?

In The Self, Mead contends that human thought and the complex process of thinking can only occur by taking the attitude of the generalized other toward himself, in one or another of these ways?for only thus can thinking or internalized conversation of gestures which constitutes thinking occur. And only through the taking by individuals of the attitude or attitudes of the generalized other towards themselves is the existence of a universe of discourse which thinking presupposes as its context, rendered possible? (156). This implicates that man can only think when he places himself within and reflects internally according to the generalized other since the generalized other provides the context for thought. Does this imply that people are incapable of thought beyond the bounds of influence of the generalized other or institution? How is this even possible? Mead's suggestion appears to be contradictory to the thought processes of contemporary human beings. Do we not see individuals capable of
examining and adopting the philosophies of multiple
generalized others, thus indicating that humans
demonstrate the capacity for thought outside the realm of
the generalized other as they choose that which they
adopt? How does Mead’s assertion take into account this
aspect of human thought that includes choice? Can one
?think? and then ?choose? outside of the generalized
other? Or, is man always restricted by the construct of the
generalized other?
As a side note...
For some reason, this section of the mead article really
disturbed me (even though I could totally be reading his
assertion incorrectly and letting my imagination run wild
with it). But are we really controlled that much by the
generalized other that it renders us incapable of our own
thoughts outside of it’s influence? Do we even have free
will or is any decision we make somehow influenced by the
generalized other? (a very scary thought in my mind…)

In your introduction to George Herbert Mead: A
Unifying Theory For Sociology, you describe how
Mead eliminates many dualisms present in previous
sociological theories. You specifically mention the
mind-body dualism and the dualism in micro and
macro levels of sociological analysis. Would you
please explain exactly what these dualisms are, and
how they limited sociological progress? Why wasn’t it
possible for these dualisms to exist while they were
applicable and effective at explaining their respective
facets of sociology?

In Baldwin’s interpretation of Mead’s description of the
increasingly structured self in his article The Self and
Society, Mead asserts that an individual’s level of social
sophistication and self-awareness is concordant with
his/her ability to view his/her objective self (or the “me”)
from the perspectives of various other members of
society, for whom he/she embodies countless different
roles (p. 114). How much might an individual’s subjective
interpretation of his/her roles affect how he /she acts
toward others in response? Furthermore, according to
Mead, how much does subjectivity influence whether an
individual is truly self-aware? For example, one might
consider himself another person’s best friend and act
accordingly, giving the person advice on personal matters
and assuming invitations to events, when in fact, the
person does not really consider him his best friend. Would
this person be considered highly sophisticated for
understanding that he embodies certain roles for certain
people? Or does Mead's definition of self-awareness assume that an individual must be correct in his/her interpretation of those roles?

Also, do you know if this is the origin of the 1990's psychology and communication fad of theorizing about "emotional intelligence"?

Baldwin refers to Mead's argument that only with vocal gesture can the giver of a gesture know and understand the meaning in the same way as the receiver. Vocal gesture "has the potential to communicate the same meaning to both the speaker and the listener" (p 74). However, I would argue that in fact, people do not always perceive the tone in which they say things in the same way others hear it; and also that people often make intentional gestures to convey a meaning that both they and the receiver of the gesture are fully aware of. Often when people say things, the tone of their statement makes the receiver believe an entirely different response to and completion of the act will result than the speaker intended. Also, people often make conscious gestures, such as a wink, where both the giver and the receiver will expect the same response to and completion of the act, while the giver of the gesture could not have seen himself giving it. How would you (or Mead) respond to this counter-argument?

In the article by John Baldwin, "Language and Intelligence", I question the absolute certainty that Mead posits about animals' complete lack of awareness of their gestures. According to Mead's analysis, "Even though we can consciously identify the meaning of animal gestures, we should not infer that animals themselves are "aware" or "conscious" of the meaning. (p.73)"  I do understand that most animals' gestures and actions seem solely instinctual to us, but I don't think Mead can unequivocally say it is outside their realm of awareness. Some animals are more intelligent than others, and I don't see why it would be so difficult for the smarter animals to develop a basic understanding of their gestures. If every time a dog wagged its tail it received a doggy treat, couldn't it realize that if it is hungry, it needs to make the tail-wagging gesture? The way some dogs are trained today it seems as if they are very conscious of their gestures, especially the dogs in dog shows. It is true that they have been trained to act in a certain manner but it shows that they are capable of being aware of their gestures and their meanings.
As a psychology major, I need to see a valid study to prove or disprove that animals are aware of their actions. In Baldwin’s discourse about Mead’s analysis, the readers are just expected to effectively agree with Mead’s viewpoint on the animals’ lack of consciousness because he is a professional in the field, not because there is any overwhelming evidence displayed to solidify his claim. If there have been experiments or case studies that have proved Mead to be correct, then his argument will seem like more than a personal perspective on the matter. I would like to know what has been done to prove that "two dogs are not aware of the meaning of signals they are exchanging. (p.73)" and solidify Mead's claim.

From what I know of sociology so far, Mead’s argument, and Baldwin’s summary, that language is an institution makes complete sense. An institution is something that is established and standardized and language seems to fit into this mold. In terms of social development and language’s ties to it, Mead argues that there are different types of language, or conversation, that one must master in order to be a part of social activity. First, there are conversations of gestures, where the individual learns that his action or gesture will in turn predict the action of the individual he is with and in turn his own next action. With this concept, meaning soon starts to grow from the gestures. This can be seen in the G-R-C thought model- gesture, response, and consequence of the initial gesture. Another way an individual develops is through the process of inner conversation and the eventual development of consciousness.

Using all of these approaches, there will be an eventual emergence of the “self.” The self is affected by society and visa versa. Children develop the self through Play and Games as they learn roles and how to see the world from another’s point of view. When the mind or “self” is developed, it is easy to see a reflection of the social community within it. Yes, each “self” is unique, but it is also important for every individual to feel like they are part of a whole.

My question for John Baldwin stems from his discussion of the “I” and the “Me.” Baldwin summarizes Mead’s argument when he says “the ‘I’ is merely the source of unexpected, emergent acts” (118). Do you think it is because of Mead’s position as an avid supporter of the scientific method that he fails to include the idea of fate
In the article "Language and Intelligence," Baldwin talks about gestures, their meanings, and how they predict what will occur next in the chain of reactions. He uses the example of dogs snarling at each other, which would predict some sort of altercation (pg. 3). I think it is agreeable that as we see it, this is a likely occurrence. But what if the gestures communicated between two people are not interpreted the way one would expect? A random onlooker might see one person smile to another and assume the two are friends. However, I have seen this occur many times and the two are not friends in fact. They secretly dislike each other but out of politeness force a smile. Or perhaps one is happy with what they think the relationship is but the other is not. The relationship between the two subjects is not realizable to the person looking on and is therefore not what they had predicted. A smile predicts friendliness but many times, it is the opposite. You would predict that as a result of this "friendliness", the two will meet later as friends when in fact they might avoid each other from then on. So I disagree that a common gesture, using a smile as example, will predict the interaction between two people.

My paragraph was more comment-like than question-like so I hope that is ok. Please email me back with any suggestions if I can make this, as well as future assignments, better.

In John Baldwin’s Chapter 6 on Language and Intelligence, he argues that all gestures are "truncated acts" (page 71) in that they are wordless illustrations of certain acts to come. Knowing this, animals and humans can foresee what will happen to them next simply by paying attention to the body language of the opposing being. For example, if two people are arguing and one begins clenching their fists, the other person might realize that they are ready to fight or are, at least, attempting to hold back from attacking. In that situation, the clenching of the fists foreshadows the aggression that is yet to come. Along with these physical gestures, Baldwin also speaks of verbal gestures. He explains that verbal gestures are necessary in order to allow the speaker and listener to understand the same message, although they may not react in the same way emotionally. If two people are in a fight and one yells at the other, both can understand that this person is angry, but the one being yelled at may feel sad, rather than angry. Given all of this information, can nonverbal and verbal language exist
without the other while still conveying intelligence? Meaning, is there a way to illustrate the entirety of one’s intellect and understanding while only using nonverbal forms of communication? Or do these gestures depend on their verbal counterparts to express specific meaning and thought?

Question 1: I read the statement "The first function of the (emotional) gesture is the mutual adjustment of changing social response to changing social stimulation..." In regard to the dog example, in which the dogs are expressing emotion and present, as well as future actions. The dogs snarl would be the social response to other dogs snarls which would act as the social stimulus. The dogs act instinctively and according to Mead, the dogs actions have a higher social function than just the conveyance of emotion. I do not see how the snarls and snaps of these dogs are serving a higher social purpose other than the conveyance of their raw emotion seeing as how the society of dogs has not furthered itself past fighting and snarling as long as humans have observed dogs in history.

?The value of an ordered society is essential to our existence, but there also has to be room for an expression of the individual himself if there is to be a satisfactorily developed society. A means for such expression must be provided? (Mead, 221). In my opinion, this conclusion developed by Mead explains the importance of the balance between following what is socially acceptable and being a unique individual. Mead discusses the idea that the self arises slowly as an infant becomes an adult. On page 138 of ?The Self? Mead states, ?It will be some time before he can successfully unite the different parts of his own body, such as his hands and feet, which he sees and feels, into a single object.? When a baby is born the brain is not fully developed because it would not be able to fit through the birth canal of the mother if it was born completely mature. As the brain matures with age and the sensory and motor homunculus develop, the human brain is able to fully map out the location and perceive sensory information from the individual body parts. Could Mead have been trying to show that with the development of these brain structures also comes a more complete understanding of the body and its actions? Mead also said that through role playing a child further develops their personalities by taking on the roles of others. Most children seem to get their ideas or what a particular role entails through observation. Most of these observations may be fairly stereotypical or inaccurate. Is this why the ?self? is said not to be fully developed until the person has had real world
interactions? Inventive and revolutionary thinkers are not very common, but they do have an impact on society and the way that we look at the world. On page 222 Mead says, ?The structure of his self expresses or reflects the general behavior pattern of this social group to which he belongs, just as does the structure of the self of every other individual belonging to this social group.? If this is true how to revolutionary ideas take place? Where in the ?self? do they develop if the ?self? reflects the general behavior pattern of society? On page 75 of ?Language and Intelligence? John Baldwin says, ?In contrast to body movements and postures, the vocal gesture is perceived much the same by the sender and the receiver.? If this is true, how does manipulation take place? Can the situation have an effect on the way the vocal gesture is perceived? Mead used the example of someone asking you to ?pull up a chair?, but doesn?t the reaction also have something to do with who is doing the asking? If an authority figure is asking you to ?pull up a chair? will it not have a different response than if your closest friend asks you?

In the reading titled “Self and Society”, the topic of multiple selves comes up. It says “the breaking of the self into several parts is especially likely when we interact with different people who place different demands on us” (113). I never thought of it in this way. I wonder if what people in modern society call “two-faced” would fall into this category. When someone is with a different group of people they might have a different set of social “standards” that they feel that they must live up to. So is this another form of role taking? And if we in fact have multiple selves, which one is truly the real self? I don’t entirely grasp the idea of multiple selves, but I find it an interesting way to look at different roles that people take on. Do you agree that there are multiple selves or is it simply different behaviors? How do you know if you are simply being yourself or are all selves yourself? It says that you are one unified self within all these selves but I find that difficult to understand. Do you agree with all of Mead’s ideas of the self or do you simply find them interesting?

When Mead brings up the idea of the “I” versus the “me”, I find it to be a very Freudian idea. It is interesting how he says that we never really know the “I”, it is impulsive and we don’t really know what it will do until after it is done. This seems similar to Freud’s idea of the id and the “me” seems like the ego, like a conscience. Do you believe that Mead relates to these Freudian ideas?

In his piece, Baldwin discusses the idea, or truly Mead's
idea, that "Meaning can exist without awareness of
meaning" (p. 73). Mead is quoted as saying "for
[meaning] need not be conscious at all, and is not in fact
until significant symbols are evolved in the process of
human social experience" Mead, 1934: 80). Meaning, in
these interactions, is not consciously recognized and yet
the participants interact with it. In essence we could be
performing gestures everyday without consciously
implying meaning, both audibly and visibly, and the other
person would subconsciously pick up hints. Baldwin then,
in the same reading, discusses Mead's idea of significant
symbols (or things that have the same meaning for all
actors involved) and states that without them, people
would not be able to converse or understand one another.
This conscious/unconsciousness clash brings up my
question. If we are interacting while using gestures that
we are not aware of and the other person is interacting to
these gestures as well, would that not be communicating
with each other without significant symbols? Take a dog
and human interaction for example (one that Baldwin
uses). The dog is wagging its tail and the human picks up
the idea that the dog is happy. Baldwin does mention the
idea that significant symbols only "functionally" need to
have the same meaning for the people involved, but even
still, who are we to say that the dog is not purposefully
communicating this idea? It is making one gesture and the
human picks up the meaning; they are therefore
communicating are they not? If so, does that not negate
this idea that we would not be able to understand one
another without significant symbols?

Mead acknowledges the potential discrepancy of
interpretations between two people who mutually
understand a symbol (language) to be a significant
symbol. In his example of the word dog, Mead explains,
"There is a whole series of possible responses. There are
certain types which are all in us, and there are others
which vary with the individuals, but there is always an
organization of the responses which can be called out by
the term 'dog.'" To what extent to our personal
experiences with the symbol affect our semantic
interpretation of that symbol? I view a dog as a man's
best friend, yet another may perceive a dog as a vicious
animal if his or her experiences have led them to such a
conclusion. Do we then understand a dog to be the same
thing because our opposite interpretations fall under "an
organization of the responses" which could conceivably be
aroused in any individual? Or does the term dog no longer
become a significant symbol because our interpretations
Baldwin asserts that meaning is an inherent part of social interaction. When evaluating this statement, Baldwin delves into the many different forms of communication, how they relate, and why they are significant. The first type of communication that Baldwin evaluates is that of Non-verbal communication. The example used in depth is that of two dogs approaching each other in a hostile manner. Baldwin describes how the dogs will growl, circling one another until there is a point at which one attacks. The question that is dealt with is: Is there meaning in the actions of an animal, even in the animal cannot evaluate the meaning of those actions? The answer is yes. Though the two dogs are not rationalizing the events taking place, they are internalizing the meaning of the other dog’s actions with great ease. When one dog growls at another, it becomes clear to the other dog that he is in a hostile situation. The notion of perception of meaning, without rational thought, is asserted to be universal across human and animal interaction by Baldwin. There is however a large dichotomy between the effects of non-verbal and verbal interactions.

Verbal interactions require both the perceiver and creator of speech to possess a rational thought process. In addition, both the person who is speaking, and the person who is listening are able to hear the words in the same manner, and thus perceive them in the same manner. When someone says, “don’t cross the street,” the meaning is the same for both members of the conversation. This however raises questions about the interplay between verbal and non-verbal communication. They are always related. If someone is saying “come over to my house later,” it could imply anything from a sexual gesture to a frustrated solution. The tone of voice, and posture of body are what condition the manner in which the listener perceives the comment. My question is this: If non-verbal interaction is inherently meaningful, then is it possible to communicate effectively verbally without the appropriate tone of voice and body language? Is verbal communication naturally less potent?
In Mind, Self, And Society, Mead claims that the Self of an individual is formed during childhood and "is not present in the early months of life," (Baldwin pg. 108). To Mead, the formation of the Self results from the child assuming the roles and discovering attitudes of other individuals towards himself, and then discovering, through games, his relationship to the generalized which, "helps the child acquire a 'unity of personality,'" (Baldwin, pg. 111). Thus, Mead claim is that the Self is entirely a creation of society.

However, Mead also describes how the Self consists of the components the I and the me. The me is the I's conception of the Self and thus it embodies the different roles that the child has learned to assume as well as his personality. The I on the other hand, is the acting Self, which, Mead admits, is wholly unpredictable. The I is not affected by societal roles and institutions that formed the Self except when the me calls on it to act according to societal pressures the me embodies. However, the I may or may not obey the call of the me. Thus, it seems that in the formation of the self that Mead describes, what was really being formed was the me while the I was unaffected by the societal roles and forces that shaped the self and created the me. But since Mead's explanation of the formation of the Self only includes the me, the question remains, where and how is the I formed? Doesn't this contradict Mead's idea that the Self is only formed in childhood, and that it is formed entirely by society?

In Berger and Berger's "What is an Institution? The case of Language? argues that "language is very probably the fundamental institution of society, as well as being the first institution encountered by the individual biographically?. They seem to define institutions as concrete cultural devices which control and describe our realities/societies. Language, to Berger and Berger, is the fundamental institution contributing to the basic ideas of all cultures. It is in fact, how we think and describe the world around us. Having a language is imperative for a culture to function. However, if a word does not exist in a certain culture's language, does that mean that the idea this word represents does not exist in this culture? For example, in an Australian Aboriginal culture the word "love" does not exist. But it is obvious that love is a very basic part of every human as seen by a mother's biologically built in love for her child. So could there be a more fundamental institution than language? Could our intuitions or emotions be seen as institutions as well? Or are these devices too simple to describe our societies?
In his piece titled, "The Self," George Herbert Mead states that "[i]n reflective intelligence one thinks to act, and to act solely so that this action remains a part of a social process" (pg. 141). What exactly is this "social process"? What would be the consequences if one were to act against it? Do people make their choices based on a desire to fit into society?

John Baldwin, on the other hand, describes reflective intelligence as "...a higher form of consciousness that arises from the use of significant symbols" (pg. 84) in his chapter "Language and Intelligence." Are most people aware of this higher form of consciousness? When one thinks to himself, he is in a way talking to himself and rationalizing his options. What are examples of significant symbols? Are they universal so that everyone goes through the same thought process?

My first question is not related to the readings for the John Baldwin lecture, but to the very first reading we were assigned. The whole essay is about the “sociological imagination” and how, in effect it will help mankind to understand how he relates to, influences, and is influenced by society, and how it will help us make sense of our chaotic world. What I want to know is how mankind is supposed to actually attain the ‘sociological imagination?’ Nowhere in the passage did I see a point where the author mentioned this.

On the first page of "The Self and Society," Baldwin states that "the self can come into existence only in terms of society and other selves" (pg 1). So in the hypothetical case of a human being who has managed to live with absolutely no social interaction, would he then have no "self"? Why could this person not communicate with himself in significant symbols? Is it absolutely critical to have social interaction in order to have a self? I'm also curious to know if the self is ever complete? Or does it change with the changing society. Does everyone attain their selves in the same manner? Mead also states that personality arises out of games. What then is the explanation for the relation between genetics and personality, if personality is built up in the child after birth? Mead says that each person has common traits shared with others and their own unique traits, What are examples of these "common traits?" The entire "I" and "me" section confuses me. Mead says that the "I" is
unpredictable or predicted unsuccessfully. If I think to myself "in the next 5 seconds i will wiggle my pinky finger" and then precede to do so, how was that prediction incorrect? Was the "I" not controlling the action? I think Mead has me at a bit of a loss!