

WEEK SIX

Mon Oct 19, 2009

Tues Oct 20, 2009

**IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT: ERVING GOFFMAN AND
PRESENTATION OF SELF**

LECTURE OUTLINE

- 1. ERVING GOFFMAN**
Summary of his Theory

- 2. MANAGING IDENTITIES: IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT**
Impression Management
Gender as Impression Management

- 3. AN EMPIRICAL EXAMPLE: GENDER AS IMPRESSION
MANAGEMENT**

- 4. CONCLUSION**

Questions of the week

Are self-presentations dishonest and inauthentic?

How are identities produced?

How are identities managed?

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DETAILED LECTURE NOTES

1. ERVING GOFFMAN: A SUMMARY OF HIS THEORY OF PRESENTATION OF SELF

General statement Goffman has articulated in a brilliant manner that social life can be illuminated and better understood by employing a dramaturgical metaphor or “life as theater” perspective.

Key Points

- 1) Most behavior takes place in environments in which actors see to perform in ways that demonstrate positive aspects of their behavior.
- 2) Efforts to understand behavior must take into account the international contexts, the audiences present, and the definitions of the situation employed by the actors.
- 3) Most interaction develops a working consensus among actors that includes definitions of the selves involved and the line of conduct they are to follow.
- 4) The concept of the “real self” is a complex and elusive one and is limited to what we can observe from the conduct and expressions of others.
- 5) We can seek to define the self in terms of the performances we witness and are a part of, which can be intentional or unintentional, or contrived or “sincere”.
- 6) The examination of embarrassing incidents can reveal much about the nature of interaction as a dramaturgical enterprise.
- 7) Problematic or failed performances provoke reflection and provide insights about the nature of routine “successful” interaction.

GOFFMAN INTERACTION RITUALS

General statement

Goffman's microsociology includes several concepts that illuminate the typical orderliness of face-to-face interaction in everyday life.

Key Points

- 1) In routine interactions, actors make an effort to present their best face and to impress others of their social worth.
- 2) Embarrassment is a consequence of a flawed or failed performance that results in a negative self-judgment.
- 3) The successful demonstration and maintenance of face depends on an implicit agreement among actors to mutually accept one another's presentation of self.
- 4) Avoidance of things that threaten the actors' faces is a common type of face-work.
- 5) A corrective process is used to remedy situations or interactions in which an individual's presented self and face is threatened.
- 6) Goffman's work shows how the self is treated as a near sacred object in everyday life.

2. MANAGING IDENTITIES: IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

DEFINITION OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT: we present particular aspects of ourselves in interaction so as to achieve the outcomes we desire

as Goffman said: like actors on a stage, individuals in social situations manipulate the impressions they give off to manage others' perceptions of them

Dramaturgy Metaphor = life is a theatrical performance

This means:

- we play different roles (behave differently)
- use different costumes and props for different situations (dress differently)
- we say some things directly to the people they concern and other comments we make behind their backs
- we organize our cues so as to elicit the desired response
- we manage the impressions we give off to others both consciously and unconsciously
- we impression manage using a large variety of communicative devices, interactional tactics and the use of external props

EXAMPLE: The Restaurant Setting

- the front stage = the place where individuals dine
- the back stage = the kitchen
- props = tables, uniforms, flowers, decor = formal or informal place staging = the way in which tables are arranged; how waiters treat customers
- impression management takes place through **team work** meaning that it is "staged" by teams of people
- **for example**, restaurant staff collaborate to manage impressions through the use of teamwork devices, language, coordinated action
- **teamwork devices** include space, props, language, setting, dress, interactions and so on

Space = frontstage and backstage

Props = clothing, jewellery, makeup, cars, houses, books, pictures, furnishings

GENDER, RACE AND AGE DISPLAYS AS IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Presentations of self actually **alert others** to one's social position **before** verbal interaction even begins.

Gender, Age and Racialized Displays: tell others (are signals) about what kind of self we are and how we therefore expect to be treated.

Definition of gender/race/age displays: the ability of individuals to perform culturally prescribed roles believed appropriate for men and women of particular ethnicities and of a certain age

Definition of Emotional Displays = the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display (Hochschild 1983)

= emotions are socially constructed

= we learn how and when and to what

extent to display emotions

EG: funerals, weddings, birthdays = emotion work

EG: those in the service industry, such as waitresses, flight attendants, bartenders

- shared, social definitions tend to emerge about what we kind of emotional display we expect to find with certain groups and occupations

What social purpose do displays serve?

- they signal to others that the actor is claiming a particular kind of self with a set of associated traits, abilities, privileges and feelings

- through these displays, the individual positions her/himself in the social hierarchy

EG: Michael Jackson

Even when we watch a transformation and know that a metamorphosis is deliberate, strategic, we still believe that the impressions people are giving off in fact is providing us with information about their fundamental character.

HOW DO WE RESIST AND NEGOTIATE OUR DISPLAYS AND THE DEFINITIONS OF OTHERS?

Definition = individuals resist traditional expectations and manipulate their self-presentation to avoid association with some stereotype

EG: women trying to fit into corporate stereotypes of high performing “players” are often the opposite of traditional female stereotypes

IS RESISTANCE AND NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY PRESENTATION ALWAYS SUCCESSFUL?

Sometimes

Other times, those with the most **power** in a situation are best able to assert their definition of the situation.

Can you think of an example?

AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO TEAMWORK

- often know they are being managed = mutual pretense
- have the option of going along with the performance or negating it by heckling or other forms of disrespect
- the audience may see through the formal façade but carefully act in such a way as to convince the actors that they do not

Why? Because everyone is engaged in mutual impression management

Mutual Impression Management

- in most social situation, impression management goes both ways meaning we attempt to manage others' impressions of us and they attempt to manage our impression of them

Why is mutual impression management always occurring?

Goffman articulates a '**threat-based view**' of human interaction which suggests that individuals are always performing, always 'on stage', rarely if ever able to drop their guard because they need to stay 'in face' (performance) in order to 'save face' (avoid embarrassment)

- individuals will do anything to avoid shame, embarrassment, humiliation which amounts to 'losing face' or being 'out of face'
- avoiding shame is a powerful motivator so individuals are motivated to constantly impression manage in order to be seen by others, and thus by themselves, as praise-worthy, decent individuals

How do individuals engage in mutual impression management?

- By following the explicit and implicit rules of behaviour
- learning the rules, watching others perform the rules, always following the rules means that you avoid potentially embarrassing situations which means you are always 'in face'
- all interaction is guided by formal and informal rules of thinking, acting and feeling

What is the result of engaging in mutual impression management?

- Following interactional rules lead to social and cultural patterns that are repeated and repeated, thus leading to what we call '**interactional stability**' (why things stay the same)
- the key to interactional stability (as opposed to interactional change) is mutual impression management and following the interactional rules present in every social situation

Social Regulation

Goffman thus offers an explanation for how and why things stay the same, how we can predict what will occur in certain situations and why this prediction is important to us

- interaction is governed by formal and informal rules of thinking, acting and feeling
- following the rules leads to social order or social regulation and predictability
- learning the appropriate rules is very time consuming and can only be determined through constant assessment, calculation, strategies, tactics and actions of participants who are always taking the role of the other into account
- rules constantly change and rules are complicated meaning that this self/other-social object assessment is ongoing in order for 'successful' impression management to take place

Empirical Examples:

Goffman, E. 1991. *Asylums: essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. New York: Penguin.

Film: *One Flew over the Cuckoos Nest*

Both detail the behaviour of the mentally ill and compare it to everyday notions of appropriate behaviour

Why do this? To make visible the social rules and regulations being transgressed

To make visible how social rules and impression management together work together to govern or regulate the way people behave (this is what we call 'social order')

Ceremonial Directives = rules of etiquette

- focus on one particular type of rule

MISREADING/MISINTERPREATION

This is what we call it when social situations go bad, when individuals fail to read the signs being give off by impression management

What are the consequences of misreading?

- persons of similar status may use conventional signs, both to avoid a mistaken recognition of the assessing person and to further recognition if their own assessment is accurate
- if interaction breaks down, if a Meadian 'problem' arises, then individuals often work to find an mutually agreeable consensus

WORKING CONSENSUS

Definition = a publicly- agreed-on definition of the situation

Goffman

- individuals do not always 'know' what is expected of them in every social situation nor do they always agree with what is expected of them so they have to **negotiate with others** to reach an agreement
- individuals develop a "**working consensus**" in every social situation = an agreement about what sort of situation they are in and what sort of roles or identities they are playing
- individuals negotiate with each other to define the working consensus
- once agreement is reached, it acquires a certain **moral force** since individuals know what to expect and in turn are obliged to act accordingly

Note: in every observation, researcher looks to describe the working consensus.

What social structural elements shape negotiation?

How do different identities such as race/ethnicity, social class, dis/ability, sexuality and gender affect the ways individuals negotiate, with whom, about what, in what manner, and for how long?

The Effects of Social Structure on Negotiations?

Goffman was very interested in the effects of social structure on individual behavior, feelings and thinking.

He argued that presentations of self are closely tied to an individual's position in the social structure

EMPIRICAL EXAMPLE: NEGOTIATED ORDER

Strauss, Anselm et al. 1994. "The hospital and its negotiated order" in Freidson, Eliot (Hrsg.): *The Hospital in Modern Society*, New York, 147-169.

Strauss, Anselm. 1978. *Negotiations: varieties, processes, contexts, and social order*, San Francisco, 105-141.

= the typical way in which SI defines social organization

= organized life is characterized by change and the development of a social order in which participants work out shared agreements and tacit understandings in response to everyday contingencies

= negotiation is limited by ideological commitments and hierarchical positions

= negotiated orders are contingent upon structural conditions and more stable elements of social order

= bounded and limited by larger societal structural contexts even though negotiated orders are dynamic and changing

4. CONCLUSION

How do our understandings of social identity, male gender identities, male body images affect gendered styles of interaction and gendered styles of emotion work?

Are all these things connected?

Develop a theoretical perspective that explains the interconnection among identity, gender, embodiment, communication styles and emotion work.