

Symbolic Interactionism

Sociology 319 – Contemporary Social Theories

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Readings:

CST, chapter 8 and two readings from Goffman in class handout.

C. Goffman's approach to symbolic interactionism

(Adams and Sydie, pp. 167-179).

Adams, B. N., and Sydie, R. A. (2001). *Goffman's approach to symbolic interactionism*. In *Sociological theory* (pp. 167–179). Pine Forge Press

1. Introduction

One of the sociologists who developed a particular form of symbolic interaction approach to examine human interaction in social settings was Erving Goffman. Goffman did not develop a theoretical approach that would explain all parts of the social world, but primarily analyzed the interaction order – the social situations or “environments in which two or more individuals are physically in one another's presence” (Goffman in Lemert, p. 235). These are the situations where we spend much or most of our life – in face-to-face activities involving others, whether these be everyday social situations, situations within organized structures (jobs, school), unusual social situations (accidents, weddings, funerals), or mediated situations (telephone and other forms of communication).

Adams and Sydie argue that Goffman used an inductive approach, “identifying the ways in which individuals in a variety of social contexts accomplished interaction” (p. 169), rather than attempting to fit human actions into a specific model. They note that “Goffman's work was the observation and analysis of individual conduct ‘as an attribute of social order, of society, not an attribute of individual persons’” (p. 168, middle). In doing this, he was concerned with the individual and the self, viewing these as the “product of social interaction, not on the individual whose existence predated society” (Adams and Sydie, p. 169). Goffman excels at observation and description, analyzing how people interpret and act in ordinary situations and providing guidelines concerning how to examine social situations. He develops a sociology of everyday life and was a careful and astute observer of everyday social interaction.

An example of how Goffman approaches social interaction comes from the following quote (Goffman quote on Blumer handout):

Universal human nature is not a very human thing. By acquiring it, the person becomes a kind of construct, built up not from inner psychic propensities but

from moral rules that are impressed upon him from without. These rules, when followed, determine the evaluation he will make of himself and his fellow-participants in the encounter, the distribution of his feelings, and the kinds of practices he will employ to maintain a specified and obligatory kind of ritual equilibrium. ... Instead of abiding by the rules, there may be much effort to break them safely. But if an encounter or undertaking is to be sustained as a viable system of interaction organized on ritual principles, then these variations must be held within certain bounds and nicely counterbalanced by corresponding modification in some of the other rules and understandings. Similarly, the human nature of a particular set of persons may be specially designed for the special kind of undertakings in which they participate, but still each of these persons must have within him something of the balance of characteristics required of a usable participant in any ritually organized system of social activity. (Goffman, 1967, p. 45).

This quote illustrates Goffman's approach – emphasis on the social nature of human beings, the social origin of the self (not some predetermined self that is separate from society), influences from society, forms of interaction, evaluation of self and others, practices and procedures for such interaction (both following and modifying rules), and maintaining some type of normal or equilibrium relationship in interaction. He notes that the system has “ritual principles” and “ritual equilibrium.” Adams and Sydie argue that, for Goffman, the connection between individual and society is that of ritual (p. 169, 2nd ¶). That is, in order to maintain civility and good will in interaction, individuals perform rituals and the exercise and performance of these rituals is the “ritually organized system of social activity.”

Individual Ritual Society

Erving Goffman (1922-1982) was born and raised in Alberta, and attended the University of Toronto and the University of Chicago. He became a professor at Berkeley and later at Pennsylvania. Goffman's best known work is *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959), the research for which he conducted in the Shetland Islands of Scotland (Adams and Sydie, p. 168). Goffman described and analyzed unusual situations such as monasteries, prisons, and asylums, total institutions that are “closed to the outside world” (Adams and Sydie, p. 175) and all-encompassing on social life within them. He used these examples to show how individuals developed and used various means (many unauthorized) to maintain their sense of selfhood within the constraints and regulations of these institutions. He also used these settings to illustrate aspects of everyday life, and the unexamined assumptions that we make in such situations.

2. Dramaturgy (Adams and Sydie, pp. 173-175).

Goffman's approach is sometimes called dramaturgy or dramaturgical theory in that he used theatre and drama as a metaphor for how the individual presents his or her self and how individuals attempt to preserve selfhood. He examines the roles taken on by the individual, what the different aspects of these roles are, how the individual interprets and performs these roles, and how the individual distances himself or

herself from the role. These set a stage that can be used to explain human interaction and it is the linkages among actors and countless minor syntheses that constitute the interaction order. Adams and Sydie note “The theatre metaphor was a handy means of illustrating the ‘structure of social encounters’ that occur in all social life” (p. 170). An individual’s impression management or presentation of self is not so much a part of the individual but “derives from ‘the whole scene of the action’” (Adams and Sydie, p. 173, bottom). That is, the self that is presented to others emerges from the situation, the way an individual acts in the situation, the perceptions and responses of others, and the manner in which social interaction proceeds. As a result, the self is not “the product of some intrinsic nature...it is a dramatic effect arising from the scene” and how the scene is viewed by others (Adams and Sydie, pp. 173-4).

Goffman examined the front and back stages or regions of human action and interaction in a theatrical setting, using these as a way of illustrating how everyday social life can be considered as a theatrical setting. Goffman defines the front region of daily life as that of managing the individual’s impressions in dealings with others. That is, a large part of what individuals do in face-to-face encounters is impression management – ensuring that the image given to others in an encounter is consistent with the role or impression that the individual wishes to convey. There are various props that might be considered natural, such as sex or age, size and looks (Adams and Sydie, p. 174) along with ways that the individual presents himself or herself – clothing, posture, bodily gestures, speech patterns – and what might be termed attitudes and behaviours or actions associated with deference, submission, mastery, or emotion.

The back stage or region is what goes on behind the scene, as the individual prepares and practices impression management. This may be stressful or relaxed, depending on the situation that the individual is to enter, but in the back stage the individual need not manage the situation, since others are not yet present. If the individual is aware of the situation, the impressions are likely to be well developed and portrayed to others, with the individual having made appropriate choices in impression management, using acceptable forms of presentation appropriate for the situation. This is similar to Mead’s views of the ability of humans to examine their actions and consider how others might view these actions. Goffman did not emphasize the dialogue with the self, preferring instead to concentrate on the ways in which people interact and manage these interactions (Wallace and Wolf, p. 240).

Two aspects of the relation between front and back need emphasis. First, “maintaining the separation of front and back is important for impression management” (Adams and Sydie, p. 174). This allows the individual to prepare for presentation, avoid embarrassment, and modify presentation between encounters. For Goffman, where two individuals are involved in a presentation or encounter on the front stage, both “have a stake in ensuring a successful performance” (Adams and Sydie, p. 174). When the performance is not so successful, excuses may be provided and the other party may find ways to minimize the lack of success. That is, actors in the performance work together to create the possibility of maintaining ongoing forms of encounters that maintain the face of all

involved. Sometimes this process breaks down, when situations are difficult or when actors are not prepared. In such cases, interaction may stop or actors rehearse and prepare for a better performance next time.

A second element is that for an individual actor, it is important to ensure consistency of front and back regions. If there is consistency, the individual presents a self that is really the self – being yourself. In the case of inconsistency, some of these may become apparent if the individual is unable to manage impressions well. The situation of stage-managed presentations by politicians to media is a case in point. Politicians attempt to present positive impressions as part of the front region, but where the back region is inconsistent with this, a slip of the tongue, or unsolicited information may reveal an inconsistency.

Goffman shows the ways in which the individual works to manage impressions and accomplish a successful presentation of the self to others. Much of this work is hidden, and one of the tasks of the sociologist is to observe social situations in order to make more visible some of the unexamined aspects of encounters. For Goffman, all the ordinary situations in which interacting individuals find themselves involve a lot of work on the part of the individual.

3. Role distance. See handout “Role Distance,” From Lemert and Branaman, pp. 35-41.

An example of Goffman’s approach is his examination of roles and role distance. Goffman notes:

A status is a position in some system or pattern of positions and is related to the other positions in the unit through reciprocal ties, through rights and duties binding on the incumbents. Role consists of the activity the incumbent would engage in were he to act solely in terms of the normative demands upon someone in his position. Role in this normative sense is to be distinguished from role performance or role enactment, which is the actual conduct of a particular individual while on duty in his position (Goffman, 1961, p. 85).

One situation that Goffman examines in connection with roles is a merry-go-round. (See handout, pp. 35-39 for Goffman's analysis; Wallace and Wolf, p. 213 also provides a short description). A merry-go-round is a situation with a number of roles. The merry-go-round is a “natural and objective social unit.” It is a “situated activity system...yet persons are placed on this floor and something organic emerges. There is a mutual orientation of the participants ... a meshing together of their activity” (Goffman, 1961, p. 97). Role differentiation emerges – those who ride, those who watch, those who take tickets and operate the merry-go-round, and each of these roles implies a certain image of the self. “For the merry-go-round rider, for example, the self awaiting is one that entails a child's portion of bravery and muscular control, a child's portion of manliness, and often a child's title.”

Goffman examines role distance by considering people of different ages in their roles as merry-go-round riders. A two year old might find the prospect frightening and

fight to stay off the merry-go-round horse – they may become frantic and have to be taken off. At ages three and four, there is still a challenge and the rider “throws himself into the role in a serious way ... passing his parents on each turn, the rider carefully lets go one of his hands and grimly waves a smile or a kiss” (Goffman, 1961, p. 106). At age five, especially for boys, merely riding is not enough – parents are not likely to be allowed by the child to accompany them, one might keep time to the music by tapping his foot, another may lean back almost too far, etc. In this case the routine is accompanied by a self-image “an image from which he apparently withdraws by *actively* manipulating the situation” (handout, p. 37). By age seven or eight, the child may ride with no hands and test limits. He may “try to show distance by handling the task with bored, nonchalant competence, a candy bar languidly held in one hand” (handout, p. 38). At age eleven or twelve, the horse may become a race horse for the rider and the rider “is just old enough to achieve role distance by defining the whole undertaking as a lark, a situation for mockery” (handout, p. 38). Adults have different methods of showing role distance – one may make a joke of fastening the safety belt, a dating couple ride adjacent horses hold hands to bring sentiment, not daring, to the situation, and so on.

Goffman defines role distance as “this ‘effectively’ expressed pointed separateness between the individual and his putative (commonly accepted) role” (handout, p. 37). That is, “the individual is actually denying not the role but the virtual self (essence of self) that is implied in the role for all accepting performers” (handout, p. 37). Goffman notes that while mastering riding the merry-go-round horse can be accomplished very easily and at a young age, “the task of expressing that it [the developmental task] is not [a challenge] continues for a long time to be a challenge and remains a full necessity.” As well, “the immediate audiences figure very directly in the display of role distance” (handout, p. 38). Goffman further notes two ways of establishing role distance: (i) isolating oneself as much as possible for the situation, or (ii) projecting a childish self.

At the end of this essay, Goffman summarizes the importance of role distance:

if an individual is to show that he is a ‘nice guy’ or, by contrast, one much less nice than a human being need be, then it is through his using or not using role distance that this is likely to be done. It is right here, in manifestations of role distance, that the individual's personal style is to be found. And it is argued in this paper that role distance is almost as much subject to role analysis as are the core tasks of roles themselves. (handout, p. 41).

4. Face-Work. See the handout “On Face-Work,” pp. 5-15.

The handout, “On Face-Work,” is from a paper originally written by Goffman in 1955. This was fairly early in his career and lays out some of the ways in which people present a face or image of the self in social relationships, interactions, and encounters. Goffman continued to develop similar ideas to those in this article, with a more systematic analysis of social interaction in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. This book employs the model of the theatre or theatrical performance as a means of analyzing how we develop and present ourselves to others. This approach is

sometimes called dramaturgy and focuses on the techniques people use to convey impressions and create their self. In that book and in “On Face-Work” Goffman examines processes and procedures that are associated with social interactions. It is these that build and maintain the social world.

In this article, look for the four themes identified earlier (symbols, change, interaction, empiricism). Also attempt to identify and consider a variety of other themes, concepts, and issues that are addressed in the article. Some of these are:

- How Goffman uses ideas from earlier sociologists such as Durkheim, Parsons, Simmel, and Mead, but in a somewhat different manner.
- Note comments on the construction and development of the social self – as image and as actor (or player in a social game), and always through the various aspects of interactive processes. In particular, Goffman develops concepts such as commitment, face, maintenance of face, poise, and confidence to analyze how social actors deal with interactive social processes.
- While agency and structure are not a primary concern of Goffman, there are various insights into the connections associated with these – look for ways that Goffman connects these or how he considers these two social concepts. While there are limited choices in each encounter, with the range of possibilities limited by societal rules and procedures and by responses of others, there is also much flexibility and work involved in maintaining these. Tacitly agreed upon approaches dominate encounters and maintenance of the encounter is one way that interaction, rituals, and patterns are maintained.
- Goffman’s focus is on the procedures and processes of social interaction, his actor is also conscious and attributes meaning to symbols and actions of others. These procedures are forms of rituals that individuals in interaction with others perform. Particular rituals are expected in and appropriate to certain situations, while being unexpected or inappropriate in others. This approach may provide a way of bridging the gap between the subjective consciousness and praxis perspectives, by considering how social face has meaning and value, and how “tacitly enacted rituals ... defend, protect, and preserve social face” (Cohen, p. 104).
- Emotions have traditionally been downplayed or ignored as social phenomena by sociologists. Goffman considers emotions and feeling such as embarrassment, feeling bad or good, shame, pride, confidence, assurance, security, and relief (“On Face-Work,” p. 8), and makes these an integral part of his analysis of social face. These may be partly conscious but feeling of this type tend to emerge in an unconscious situation and form part of the means that social encounters are maintained. (“On Face-Work,” p. 23).
- Social order and mechanisms by which it is achieved are issues addressed by Goffman. But he addresses these at the level of the interaction order, in quite a

different manner than does Durkheim. That is, they are more tacitly agreed upon rules and procedures, coming from society but individually interpreted and, in addition, maintained through tacit procedures in social encounters.

Notes on “On Face-Work” from Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, pp. 5-45.

This article provides an illustration of the dramaturgy approach, where performance and responses to performance, are the means by which social interaction occurs. Also note that the performance is work – for Goffman, presenting the self in a role or through role distance is work in that rituals must be performed, a line presented and face maintained.

Interaction order. This is the world of face-to-face social encounters that is the topic of the article. These may be direct contacts or mediated contacts – the latter could be through mail, memoranda, telephone, or electronic messages.

Line (p. 5). An actor adopts or develops a pattern of verbal (language) and non-verbal (gestures) acts that portray his or her version of the situation, others, and self. Goffman makes particular note of the “evaluation of the participants, especially himself” so that the line presents both a view of the self and deal with how others view the actor (last line of 1st paragraph). The line taken may be conscious or less conscious, in that the line takes place, whether or not it is intended. Also note the active nature of the interaction order and how patterns are worked out in the line – it is not just the individual taking a line but also “the impression they have possibly formed” that are part of interaction. Note how the themes of symbolic interaction approaches (symbols, process, interaction, and empirical work) are illustrated in this paragraph.

Face (p. 5). This is the image of the self that is presented. That is, it is not just the face that the actor presents, but the face is really a result of the evaluations of others. Goffman here connects face to approved social attributes, although later he notes how it may not always be the approved or expected attributes that are portrayed. Face is what others assume and it is the image that others see or consider to have been expressed by the actor. Note “effectively” (2nd line of last paragraph, p. 5) so that it is what is portrayed, not necessarily what was intended, that is, it is the image of self portrayed.

Emotion (p. 6). Emotions and feelings become attached to the particular image presented, so that the actor may feel good or feel bad or being hurt, depending on how the image unfolds and what the encounter produces. If the encounter proceeds very well, the actor feels good, whereas a poor playing out of the encounter may produce bad feelings. Emotions appear to be an essential aspect of adjustment in social interaction – that is, it is not just responses of others but one’s own emotions that guides these encounters. Compare Goffman’s analysis of emotion with that of Hochschild.

Commitment (p. 6). By entering into encounters, the actor has a commitment to his or her own face and to the face of others. All of these are social constructs, spontaneous and part of the situation, not some predetermined set of unchangeable personal attributes. Further, the face of all is part of the interaction order – the face of self and of others is simultaneously created, so the two cannot be separated and the way these develop depends on the situation. The “rules of the group and the definition of the situation” (p. 6) are important in how face and images of self are viewed, so that norms and institutions are important considerations here.

Maintaining face (p. 6, bottom). An internally consistent face is one whereby the actor is in face or maintains face. But the internal consistency involves not just the actor and “is something that is not lodged in or on his body” (p. 7), rather the internal consistency involves judgements and evidence from others. That is, it is both the actions of the actor, but also the perception and view of others, through “the flow of events in the encounter” (p. 7, top) that establishes whether or not face is maintained. This is a strong praxis orientation, involving process and flow, where social interaction is necessary and is the means by which consistency is established.

Institutional (p. 7). Goffman notes that these encounters are generally within certain legitimized institutional contexts, so that there may be a limited range of possible forms of action. The actor does have choice concerning the lines and faces, but within a particular order. While there is freedom for individuality, Goffman considers there to be sets of rules which govern the range of possibilities. Note though that these may differ from Durkheim’s social facts or Parsons’s norms, in that the social actor has considerable flexibility and spontaneity, and perceptions and responses of others are important aspects of these encounters. They may be closer to the procedures of Habermas – note the “morally proper” reference.

The line and face also connect the self to a larger world. Any single activity or encounter produces a certain line and face, and these have implications beyond this encounter. It may be by “discrediting” possession of certain attributes that the individual makes this connection. For example, a bureaucrat may present a particular face that is expected, but may show himself or herself to be flexible and understanding, thus showing in a negative manner the wider attributes usually associated with the position. Goffman extended this idea into role distance – how individual actors fill certain roles but also are able to distance themselves from the role. This connection to a wider world may be to the past or the future, showing a continuity of lines and faces, or to events and situations outside the immediate interaction order. Note that it is important to maintain line and face when there is to be continued social interactions among the same individuals in similar situations. These networks and connections are reminiscent of Weber’s note of how social action need not be direct encounters with others, but could be unknown individuals, and these could be in the past, present, or future.

Wrong face (p. 8). Information that discredits the actor’s face or is inconsistent with the face of the actor may come forward from external sources or from

inadvertent slips by the actor. Goffman makes reference to some of these on p. 14, as *faux pas*, *gaffes*, or boners. Alternatively, the actor may be **out of face** if he or she has no line to present – taken by surprise, unprepared, or unfamiliar with the situation or encounter. While the actor may express “confidence and assurance” (p. 8) when in face, when in wrong face or out of face, the actor may feel dissonance within himself or herself, or may feel shame, inferiority, embarrassment, chagrin, or other bad feelings. Again note how Goffman connects internal emotions (positive and negative in effect) with lines and faces that emerge from interaction.

Poise. (p. 9). In contrast to feeling shame, the actor may always present an impression of confidence, in situations when in or out of face. Note Goffman’s emphasis on presentation of the self and how emotions are an essential aspect of this presentation.

Social face. (pp. 9-10). In this section, Goffman discusses some of the meaning of the social self – the impressions and images that the individual actor is expected to live up to, and how this is regulated internally and externally to the individual. In the middle of p. 9, there is reference to the “social code of any social circle” – a self-image that the actor has presented and which he or she is expected to live up to. Note Goffman’s argument here that the self is not only self-development and self-realization or freeing, but is also constraining – each self is expected to maintain and live up to the image of self the individual has portrayed in the past and will continue to portray. He also argues that the individual has a duty or responsibility to meet expectations – this means work at meeting these conditions.

In the interaction order the actor sustains these images through expression (expressive order), to be consistent with the actor’s face. Various possible emotional responses occur: pride (if duty to self), honour (duty to wider social units), or dignity (if handled with poise). For Goffman, the self is the individual’s personal possession, in that it defines the individual and provides the individual with “security and pleasure.” But he also notes that it is social, it is given to the individual by others, and can be withdrawn by them (p. 10). That is, if the self is the images of self that are perceived by others as the face of the individual, then this can be maintained or destroyed. In any case, it is a social self – connecting the individual to social interaction and the wider society. There is no self without social interaction, so the self is flexible but also constrained. In addition, the self that is constructed in these interactions may be the individuals “own jailer.”

Considerateness (pp. 10-11). Here Goffman moves in a somewhat different direction, beginning to examine how social interaction is played out in practice. For the most part, people attempt to save the face of others and perhaps identify with these in encounters. That is, relationships are reciprocal and self-supporting. For the most part, such interactions do not humiliate actors, but attempt to provide a way “to maintain both his own face and the face of the other participants” (p. 11). It is this “mutual acceptance” (p. 11, middle) of lines and faces that maintains social interaction, preserves the feelings and faces of each of the participants, and allows the interaction order to continue (although the situation may be a temporary one). The

faces presented are maintained and built upon, so this provides continuity in social interaction (top of p. 12). This is one way that institutions become established and maintained in society. While some may be cold and heartless, and sometimes face is discredited, Goffman focuses on the ways in which face tends to be maintained. There may be similarities in this approach to that of Habermas, in his discourse ethics. Another connection may be to the moral approval and disapproval of Parsons, although Goffman's approach appears more flexible.

Rules (p. 12). Following Goffman's observation that there is a certain order and continuity to social interaction, he begins to examine the ways that such interaction proceeds, considering the procedures associated with the interaction order. Much of the remaining part of the article considers these methods and procedures. The praxis view of social action is well demonstrated here, and at times Goffman sounds more like an ethnomethodologist than a symbolic interactionist.

On p. 12, Goffman notes that maintenance of face is not the objective of social action. There are various goals that the actor has – gaining an income, achieving friendship, pursuing spiritual values, or pursuing various personal emotional goals – and face-saving is not the objective, but rather part of the code or rules that actors use in social interaction.

Face-Work (pp. 12-13) is the general designation for the social praxis of actors. That is, the individual must work at presenting images of self, saving face, adjusting to possible loss of face, or being poised when face is threatened. By studying the rules and codes of face-work, the sociologist can understand how social interaction proceeds. On p. 13, Goffman discusses various social skills and standard practices. These are partly individual but are also associated with the individual but part of the social culture of which the person is a part. These are social in that they must be learned, and they are social in the sense that they protect own's own face and also the face of the other participants in social encounters. Various possible ways in which this may break down are mentioned on p. 14, but again Goffman notes how there are procedures that deal with these threats. On p. 15 he notes that one means is that of avoidance.

Face-work is an active process, one where the agent is an active individual. But the actor is not just an individual – face necessarily involves others and social interaction, so the focus for the social actor and his or her social self is always on the nature of the interaction. These also provide an idea of Goffman's approach to agency and structure – actors exist within these structures and institutions, but are active agents dealing with situations and encounters. Much of what Goffman says is reminiscent of Simmel, but with the emphasis more on the interaction order in the case of Goffman.

Procedures – Notes on later parts of the reading, parts that are not part of the class handout for this semester.

This section from pp. 15-33 deals with some of the procedures used in social interaction to maintain the face of the self and the face of the other, to avoid embarrassment and shame. This sometimes reads like a guide to proper etiquette in situations of face-to-face social interaction.

Tact. Being tactful and providing various hints are procedures that people use in social interaction. Reciprocal self-denial, running oneself down, praising the other, and negative bargaining are all noted here.

Avoidance

avoidance of situations with possible threats, or go-betweens, withdrawal
i.e. defensive maneuvers protective maneuvers – respect, politeness, discretion
courtesies, joking, p. 17
tactful blindness – deny what occurs, p. 18
minimize effects or loss of control, p. 18

Corrective process. pp. 19-23

ritual disequilibrium or disgrace ritual – acts with symbolic component – worthy of respect face as sacred [as opposed to profane, and separated from profane]
interchange = re-establishment of ritual equilibrium

four classic moves

- challenge – take on responsibility for noting misconduct
- offering – to restore equilibrium – joke, unavoidable, not self, reformed,
- acceptance (p. 22)
- thanks

model for ritual behavior but – deviations from model may include offering early or refusing to change, violence, withdrawal, denial of interaction
role of emotions – p. 23 – and these are part of interactive process may fit better into ritual interchange than are more conscious ones

Making points – aggressive use of face-work

encounters are normally interactive undertakings but can become an arena, contest, or match – score points snubs and digs aggressive gains advantages and demonstrates better interactive abilities (p. 25) but comebacks possible
[this part makes interchange seem more like a zero-sum game, with gains at expense of others, shifting bargaining positions, etc. also – demonstrates the implicit equality that may need to exist in “normal” interaction in order for some of earlier claims to work out]

Choice of appropriate face-work (p. 26)

attempts by both parties to repair damage if minor mishap uncertainty concerning how this will be handled (p. 27)

Cooperation in face-work

lack of effort by one may be met with more effort by others (p. 27)

simultaneous apologies (p. 28)

resolution of situation more important than apportioning blame

others protect individual eg. cannot decline a polite handshake

tacit cooperation (p. 29)

– meet shared but different objectives tact – to help self and others

tacit agreement to do business thru language of hint (p. 30)

is deniable

+ reciprocal self-denial

+ negative bargaining

performance of these types means willingness to abide by rules of interaction (p. 31)

otherwise interaction would be more hazardous

if people not ritually delicate, talk could not be organized as is.

Socialization is necessary in order to prepare the actors for such social situations.

The section beginning on p. 33 notes further procedures – using signs and symbols, various conventions, etc.

Self (p. 31). Goffman notes that he has been using the self in two senses

- as image, deriving from the perceptions and responses of others that create the face of the person.
- the actor as a player in a game or set of rituals – with positive or negative consequences, judgmental contingencies, and possible violation of sacred through profanation.

This may be similar to the I and the me of Mead, but with Goffman's theoretical discussion of the player being less clearly explained than the self as image. At the same time, Goffman does consider various aspects of the player, by focussing on the emotions of the individual – embarrassment, shame, pride, etc. so that he has developed a somewhat better explanation of the inner aspect of the self than have some other writers. What Goffman discusses in this section on pp. 31-3 is the fragility and limits of the self, and how the interaction order has certain mechanisms, check and balances (p. 33) to maintain the rituals and preserve the self. Some of these mechanisms are cooperation, signs and symbols, and well understood practices.

Note – can better accept mistreatment from self than from others – and can forgive others

Spoken interaction (p. 33).

Tendency to use signs and symbols

unguarded glance, change in tone

all talk requires attention to these

[note offense against a seemingly inadvertent email response]

procedures, rules, practices to guide and organize flow of messages (p. 34)

prepare for *state of talk* – then talk can proceed

procedures for others to join in state of talk

visual and verbal attention

formal or informal cues

length of time for each party

interruptions and lulls regulated

even if disagreement on content, agreement on rules and procedures

unit = total activity occurring during time of an accredited conversation

Self and spoken interaction (p. 36).

Handled as any other type of interaction would be.

Ritual care and appeal to face.

Decides (conscious or unconscious) how to behave

Rules of maintaining conversation and taking proper place in interaction (p. 36).

Structural aspect (p. 37)

any comment leaves open possibility of misinterpretation

ie. any comment can threaten structural equilibrium (p. 38)

test symbolic meaning

how ritual code can be upset (p. 40)

degree of perceptiveness, pride, considerateness, etc.

pathologies, but generally viable and practical

ie. orientation to **face** – own and others

promise of ritual care of face built into conversation

Encounters and ritual order. This discussion is continued in the following pages and concludes on pp. 41-4. People cooperate, avoid places where they are not wanted, talk in half-truths, etc. People work hard at face-work, attempting not to overstep accepted bounds. The ritual order then is that of maintaining face – “what will sustain for the moment the line to which he has committed himself and through this line to which he has committed the interaction” (p. 44).

Encounter is associated with a particular social relationship (p. 41)

Relationships are geared into a wider society and encounter not to disturb these

greetings and farewells a means of maintaining expected relationships

Trust self-image and face to tact and good conduct of others (p. 42)

Adjustment (p. 43) may be necessary

Social life orderly because individual stays away from unwanted situations/actors

Cooperates to save face

Social self. Pp. 44-5.

- Implication of similarity among people
- Universal human nature?
- Goffman does not say whether or not there is an essential common human nature, but notes that this cannot be answered by looking at people themselves.
- That is, must look at how societies organize social encounters and produce self-regulation of these
- But “universal human nature is not a very human thing” (p. 45).
- If so, it is not from inner psyche but from moral rules from without.
- May be a common general capacity to abide by rules and procedures of encounters and interaction.
- But particular rules come from ritual organization of social encounters
- Each individual and society combines these in different manner
- But variations are within bounds and balanced by modifications in rules and understandings
- Or human nature may be designed for particular types of encounters

Result is a strong case for a social self – not some inborn, inflexible inner self, but a social self that is produced by individual in a society.

5. Gender advertisements (Adams and Sydie, p. 177)

Goffman's earlier writings contain some analysis of sex and gender characteristics and relationships; in his later work, he expanded and developed his analysis of these relationships and their performance in society, providing interesting and insightful analyses. This is apparent in *Gender Advertisements* (1979) where Goffman presents photographs from advertisements that provide images of males, females, children, and relationships in social situations. These images are

illustrations of ritual-like bits of behavior which portray an ideal conception of the two sexes and their structural relationship to each other, accomplishing this in part by indicating, again ideally, the alignment of the actor in the social situation. (Goffman, 1979, p. 84).

While the advertisements portray ideal, artful, and “carefully performed poses,” these are reflections of the way individuals perform in social situations. He concludes

advertisers conventionalize our conventions, stylize what is already a stylization, make frivolous use of what is already something cut off from contextual controls. Their hype is hyper-ritualization. (Goffman, 1979, p. 84).

For Goffman, each individual's daily presentation in social interaction can be considered to be commercials, so that images in commercials are merely exaggerated expressions of daily performance. From this it could be argued that commercials are successful when they do this – portraying understandable and acceptable images of various aspects of life. As individuals, we recognize these images and, while television

or magazine commercials are exaggerations, it is the daily acting out of similar forms of behaviour that advertisers build on.

Goffman argues there is a loose gearing ... between social structures and what goes on in particular occasions of ritual experience” (Goffman in Lemert, 1997, p. 213). Portrayal in these situations are often related to status, role, or social distance, and a means of visible, physical positioning may be used to indicate these. Height, centrality in the image, and placement above or beside another, may all be used to indicate relative social position. This is demonstrated by the bowing or holding head high in the picture in “the ritualization of subordination” and also in the images of family (photos 116 and 100-103). In the latter, the father is a little outside the circle of the rest of the family – perhaps demonstrating a real social distance and an ability to protect the family. When viewing such images, we may not consider them abnormal, because these images of the father match common understandings of the the role of father’s – at least at the time when Goffman obtained these images.

Goffman considers the natural sex differences to be significant “only because the culture makes them so” (Adams and Sydie, p. 515). There are natural and biological differences between males and females but it is social definition and social codes “which also establishes the conceptions individuals have concerning their fundamental human nature” (Goffman in Lemert, 1997, p. 201). As an example, Goffman argues

Clearly on biological grounds, mother is in a position to breastfeed baby and father is not. Given that recalcitrant fact ... father temporarily but exclusively takes on such tasks as may involve considerable separation from the household. But this quite temporary biologically-grounded constraint turns out to be extended culturally. A whole range of domestic duties come ... to be defined as inappropriate for the male to perform; and a whole range of occupations away from the household come to be defined as inappropriate for the female. (Goffman in Lemert, 1997, p. 201).

When considering social situations and gender performance, Goffman argues that it is not fruitful to search for natural expressions, since it is not clear what these might be. As individuals relate to each other, what is expressed “is the capacity and inclination of individuals to portray a version of themselves and their relationships as strategic moments” (Goffman in Lemert, 1997, p. 222). For Goffman,

what the human nature of males and females really consists of, then, is a capacity to learn to provide and to read depictions of masculinity and femininity and a willing ness to adhere to a schedule for presenting these pictures, and this capacity they have by virtue of being persons, not females or males. One might just as well say there is no gender identity. There is only a schedule for the portrayal of gender. ... of the practice between the sexes of choreographing behaviorally a portrait of relationship. (Goffman in Lemert, 1997, p. 224).

The portrayals of femininity in *Gender Advertisements* then include smiles, puckish styling, “bashful knee bend,” and “head cant” (photos 168-9, 179-81). While the images in advertisements are somewhat exaggerated, we may not regard such images as

unusual in that these same expressions are performed daily and express commonly understood aspects of feminine performance. Goffman argues, in the case of smiles, these are “more the offering of an inferior than a superior” and are more common among women than men (photos 187-91). The puckish styling expresses a child-like quality for females (photos 192-4). The knee bend and head cant may express a relaxed manner of trust in the situation, but one where the individual is “foregoing of full effort to be prepared and on the ready for the current social situation.”

Some of these images are dated and current portrayals of males and females may be quite different. What is useful about Goffman’s images in *Gender Advertisements* is his ability to focus on aspects of male and female performance that is usually overlooked. These are not dramatic images of the type that portray women as sex objects or males as aggressive, but images of tidbits of everyday life that each of us enacts daily.

6. Conclusion. Goffman's approach provides some examples and guidelines concerning how the self and personal style can be examined and analyzed to show the diversity of forms of action and interaction. Goffman shows how there are patterns to these, as much as to the norms and roles that have been part of the more conventional sociological approach. He does not provide an overall model of how the micro and macro approaches could be integrated. What he does present is the case for the autonomy and flexibility of the interaction order, that it can be examined systematically and meaningfully, and that this can be done within the social context of societal structures.

Goffman primarily analyzed the interaction order, constituting day-to-day and face-to-face interaction among acting individuals. While he recognized other orders and the structures associated with class, power, norms and roles, as individuals act in the interaction order there is a flexibility to these structures. That is, Goffman was interested in how performance is accomplished in practice, that is, how individuals interpret and perform roles, at the same time as they distance themselves from these. It is the flexibility of these that characterizes daily life and is the expression of individual personalities. Social change and social mobility may result from these aspects of role performance, although Goffman does not focus on this. But where a role is interpreted in many ways, or norms are stretched, this may lead to new roles and norms. For the individual, structures are a constraint, but they also present opportunities, and it is in role performance that these opportunities may be expressed.

Goffman does not connect the interaction order to other orders, such as the structures of society or intermediate level organizations, institutions, or systems. In that sense, Goffman’s analysis is incomplete, but perhaps no less complete than writers who analyze societal structures but not the interaction order. Connections between these are a concern of contemporary sociology – the issue of structure and agency.

The interaction approach examines the interaction order, because that is where society exists and is reproduced – in our daily activities. This reproduction is not

necessarily in direct correspondence with the larger structures. That is, not all role enactment is an aspect of reproduction of structures – e.g. family roles are flexible and maintain family structures, but also alter them and provide new forms of family structure. It is important for sociologists to examine the assumptions underlying the interaction order (ethnomethodology) and consider how it works (symbolic interaction) in order to understand the larger structures. After all, it is the patterns and regularities that emerge from the myriad day-to-day interactions that constitute the structures of society. It is especially important to analyze these in a society with rapid social change and with high social mobility, since it is the performance of individuals in the interaction order that produce changes in these structures.

The symbolic interaction perspective did not explicitly consider women, and some feminists viewed this approach as male dominated, expressing how present structures of power are maintained through human interaction in the interaction order. Conflict theorists who consider the exercise of power as basic to understanding social relationships might have a similar approach. That is, symbolic interaction approaches tend to consider participants in the interaction order as more or less equal participants. This is not always the case for Goffman's analysis, but the basic assumptions and methods of symbolic interactionists do not include power differentials. But this approach has proven to be flexible, and some more recent forms of symbolic interaction analysis have included situations where there is coercion, power differentials, or other forms of inequality. Goffman did some of this (asylums, prisons, male-female relations) and more recent contributions have come from Arlie Hochschild and Norman Denzin.

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