

THE PRESENTATION OF SELF (GOFFMAN'S DRAMATURGICAL MODEL)

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A. The Dramaturgical Model

Erving Goffman is probably one of the most important sociologists in relation to the self. His book--Presentation of Self--remains an important book in this field. Goffman's approach is sometimes referred to as the dramaturgical model.

1. All the World's a Stage

From As you Like It;

*All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages;
At first the infant, mewling and puking in the nurses arms;
And then the whining schoolboy with his satchel
And shining morning face creeping like a snail
Unwillingly to school;
And then the lover, sighing like a furnace with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow.
And then the soldier....
And the justice....
The sixth age shifts into the lean and slippered pantaloon
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice
Turning again toward childish treble
Pipes and whistles in his sound.
Last scene of all, that ends this strange eventful history,
In second childishness and mere oblivion
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.*

2. The Performance

Our life, in this model, is simply a series of performances. While I am standing here, I am engaged in a performance in which I am trying to convey not only information about Goffman to you, but information about me through the confidence in which I speak on the topic, the manner in which I do so; the mastery of speaking in public, and so on. You, of course, are engaged in performances of a lesser magnitude, but a performance none the less. For example, you may wish to

sustain the impression that you are interested in the material (which may involve feigning or pretending); you may wish to do so to influence or create a favourable impression of your self. When you leave this room, you will move into another performance, perhaps fleeting, perhaps ongoing, as will I. The main elements of performance involve the strategies of impression management.

B. Impression Management

1. The Definition of the Situation

Central to Goffman's concern is his notion of impression management. In this, he argues that all social situations or two or more people involve attempting to persuade others of your definition of the situation. If, for example, you are buying a stereo, the salesperson is attempting to construct a definition of the situation that will suggest that you *need* to have this high end and pricier product because you are a discerning individual with good tastes, while you are trying to construct a definition which suggests that while you appreciate good music, you also have financial considerations--but you don't want to look too cheap either. So it becomes somewhat of a struggle. Furthermore, a good sales representative will try hard to persuade you that he is not really a salesman at all in the sense of putting a hard sell on you—he will try to convey sincerity as well as try to gauge the level of intimacy he may have with you. He will attempt to make connections with your interests, your musical tastes, and so on to keep the transaction more like a friendly conversation than a sales pitch. You, however, are aware of the fact that he *is* a salesman, and are trying to avoid providing him too much information that he may be able to use in his efforts to persuade you.

2. Expressions and Impressions

We create impressions through what Goffman calls *sign vehicles* which includes both our language as well as our body language. We create *impressions* by our *expressions*. And there are two different kinds of expressions:

1. *The expressions we give*, primarily the things we say, and the intentional poses, facial expressions (smiles, surprise, etc.) and other controlled body language we emit;

2. *The expressions we give off*, which are the elements of our expressiveness over which we have less control; the inconsistencies between what we say and what we actually do, the body language which “gives us away” in some situations.

What are our self presentation motives ?

1. achieve personal goals
2. present a consistent and positive view of our self to the world
3. conform to social norms

3. Front Stage, Back Stage

Impressions are managed within contexts: *settings*, such as comedians, magicians, professors, preachers, each of whom works in particular settings.

Also important is our *personal front*: sex, age, hair style, clothing, etc. We may in fact alter these things to suit the situation. Young doctor trying to look older for patients.

The front stage of our life performance occurs in situations in which we interact with others in public or professional settings. A waitress, for example, will try her best to keep a cheery disposition while she is dealing with customers, even cantankerous ones, and even if she isn't feeling well, whereas she may go back to the kitchen and talk about those cranky whiny customers. This would be somewhat more *back stage* behaviour. The most back stage behaviour occurs in one's home environment where you can stretch and "be yourself"

Situated Identities

A situated identity is the self that can be identified with the role one is currently playing. They define us in reference to the role we are playing at a given time. We need to have our identity situated before we can proceed in an interaction. If you confuse a customer with an employee in a store, the interaction is confusing until the situation is clarified, and the roles are properly identified.

Here is where impressions, including first impressions, come into play, as they can situate a person's identity.

4. Accounts: Excuses, & Justifications

Accounts are statements that people provide to explain a behaviour that was unanticipated or improper. Two types of accounts:

Excuses: attempt to lessen responsibility

Justification: an attempt to suggest that the behaviour had some positive outcome.

5. Self Enhancement and Ingratiation

Any attempt to inflate our credentials, statuses, etc.

Any attempt to alter the situation through

- a. flattery
- b. agree with others beyond your true beliefs
- c. do favours
- d. falsely present self to others in favourable light

6. Self Awareness, Self Monitoring, and Self Disclosure

When our attention is focussed on the self, we talk in terms of self awareness. We do this within our private self--that part of the self in which attitudes cannot be perceived by others.

The public self is that part which is given away by our mannerisms and behaviours.

People differ to the degree to which they are self aware, and the consequences that this entails.

Self Monitoring

Once we become accomplished actors, we get better at self monitoring so that we become more attuned to the reactions of others and adjust our behaviour accordingly, and on the fly.

Hi self monitors are very aware of their social situations, and pick up cues.

Lo self monitors are the opposite.

Self Disclosure

This is the means by which we can regulate what others know about us.

Depth, Breadth, Intimacy.