

The Self in Interaction: A Dramaturgical Approach

Friday, March 11, 2005

I. The self does not exist in isolation from others.

A. Charles Horton Cooley's (1902) "Looking Glass Self"

B. George Herbert Mead (1934): To develop, we must be able to take the perspective of others.

II. Performances (Goffman, 1959)

"All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players."
Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

"All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify."
Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

A. Line

verbal and nonverbal behaviors used to communicate our perceptions of the situation, others, and ourselves

B. Face

the positive social identities that people wish to claim for themselves (e.g., to be seen by others as “smart,” “kind,” “strong,” “assertive,” “powerful,” and so on

1. When do people *lose face*?
2. When do people try to *save face*?

C. Not all performances are designed to “fool” or “manipulate” others.

1. Idealized Performances
2. Self-Deceit
3. Self-Verification

D. Not all performances are conscious: ritualized performances.

“I have always wondered about ritualistic behavior such as small talk. Like when people ask you, ‘How are you?’ they don’t really want to know the answer, they just expect you to say ‘fine.’ Some other examples that I think fall into this general category is when people state the obvious (‘it’s cold today’), and when people do something that obviously causes you discomfort and say ‘sorry’ and you reply ‘it’s okay.’”

E. Performance elements must all come together.

F. Performances must be consistent.

G. Audiences help actors along: face work.

III. Regions: Front and Back Stage

We're not always on stage.

A. Front Region: On Stage

1. Be polite: Honor others' face needs.
2. Maintain decorum: Stick to role demands.
3. Front region behaviors are hard to enact; on-stage performances are hard.

B. Back Region: Off Stage

1. Rehearsals
2. Chastising Co-Stars
3. Making Fun of the Audience
4. Stepping Out of Character

Summary

1. Erving Goffman employed a *dramaturgical analysis* of self-presentation, borrowing elements from the stage.
2. *Not all* self-presentation is designed to manipulate or fool others (e.g., self-verification).
3. All actors have a *line* (verbal and nonverbal behaviors associated with their performances); actors and audiences all have *face needs*.
4. Behaviors can take place “*on-stage*” in the *front region*, or “*back-stage*” in the *back region*.