1. Misrepresentation (pg 58-66) - 2 pax: Joshua, Brenda
2. Mystification (pg 67-70) - 1 pax: Prachi
3. Contrivance (70-76) - 2 pax: Zhi Zhang, Hao Cheng

Brenda

Good afternoon everyone! We are going to present our main takeaways from Erving Goffman's "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life".

Firstly, I'll go through the two key terms used by Goffman.

[Key Terms] *next slide* Goffman uses the terms "performer" and "audience". Just like in the theaters, the performers put up their best performance for the audience to enjoy. Through this metaphorical approach, Goffman suggests that, in our everyday lives, all of us are performers who play our *click* own **roles**. How we want to play the role depends on what kind of **impression** we want our audience to see. The audience picks up signs from the performers' **performance**, such as their actions and expressions, and then **interprets** it.

In the case that the performance put up by the performer is <u>misleading</u>, the audience would interpret the performer's action accordingly and build a **false impression** about the performer. This is one of the ways misrepresentation occurs.

=> [Causes] *next slide* Another way misrepresentation occurs is **how the audience views** a certain performance by the performer. From this quote, (and the rest of page 58) Goffman explains that the audience can **adjust** their view and **interpret** signs from the performance in various ways. This interpretation tends to be **different** from how the <u>performer actually is</u>.

[Variation] *next slide* This brings us to the **varying views** of misrepresentation. If the performer who misrepresents him/herself is of a **higher status**, the audience would be **more concerned** since it is more significant to them. On the other hand, if the performer plays a **less important role** in society, the audience would be **less concerned**, especially in the case where the performer misrepresents him/herself to **conceal a flaw**. (A flaw is considered less honourable and it is **understandable** to hide it from the audience.)

next slide The views of misrepresentation also change with **time** as the **societal views** change. A misrepresentation years ago may not be accepted in society but years later, when **opinions change**, it is **accepted** by most of the audience. Goffman gives an example that the dyeing of hair to conceal grey hair (in order to make one look younger) was not considered acceptable in the past but it is generally accepted now. This is due to the **change in opinions over time**.

[Purpose] *next slide* Misrepresentation may be bad in cases such as **scams** or unethical sales. However, there are also cases when misrepresentation occurs for a **"good"** cause ((at least in the eyes of the performer, they think it's best for the audience not to know.)). On page

62, Goffman gives the example of telling white lies in order to **protect the feelings** of the audience. Also, on page 64, Goffman gives the example of a married couple where each partner has their own secrets, such as their "true opinions held about relatives or mutual friends". This is a way to maintain a good impression in order to **maintain a relationship**. Now, I'll pass the time on to Joshua.

Joshua

Thank you Brenda. *next slide* Continuing on from misrepresentation, Goffman elaborates further upon this in relation to the more legal side of misrepresentation. He uses the example of organizations such as real estate boards, and how they define the boundaries of how "truthful" and how vague people can be when marketing property. He sums this up in his quote "Formal recognition has been given to the shadings between lies and truths and to the embarrassing difficulties caused by this continuum." (Goffman, Page 62). This is purely because the truth is not always definite. I could be selling a house with 5 viewers who are interested. But, I can still tell another client that this particular house is very popular because how do we quantify popularity? In many cases, exaggerations are possible so it is still important to clearly define the boundaries.

next slide Next, Goffman talks about how almost everyone misrepresents things in their jobs to give a better impression, or to accomplish certain goals. But in doing so, "We must note that a false impression maintained by the individual in any of of his routines may be a threat to the whole relationship or role of which the routine is only one part" (Goffman, Page 64)" This means that catching any of our lies could diminish the impact of other truthful areas that we expound upon. An example of this is for example pretending to be very skilled at computing or other areas. Once colleagues or bosses find out that these "skills" are mediocre, it results in a loss of trust. This loss of trust extends to other areas such as punctuality, and dedication to work as your reputation has been "ruined".

next slide Finally, he concludes this part by saying that both the truth and deception require an equal amount of effort to maintain. He says that "We come back then, to a realization that while the performance offered by impostors and liars is quite flagrantly false and differs in this respect from ordinary performances, both are similar in the care their performers must exert in order to maintain the impression that is fostered." (Goffman, Page 66) This means that to successfully deceive the audience, the amount of effort required must be at least equal to the effort in proving something is true, if not the deception will most likely not work.

Prachi
Thank you Joshua. I will be explaining the concept of mystification. Goffman believes that a performer should minimize familiar contact with the audience so that the performer can control the perception that the audience has of him/her/they. By controlling the audience's perception, an idealised image of the performer can be created in the minds of the audience. The quote on the slide shows that information dealing with aberrant behavior and belief is concealed from the

audience in a process of "mystification," making prominent characteristics that are socially sanctioned, legitimating both the social role of the individual and the framework to which the role belongs. For example, when you first meet a person, your first impression may be that the person is confident. However, once you begin talking to the person and the person starts sharing their feelings with you, you may start realising their insecurities which disrupts your perception of that person. You may not idealise that person after that. Hence, Goffman believes that perceptions are developed through such interactions and thus, such interactions in which the audience gets to know the performer should be minimised so that the performer can control his/her/they image.

One of the easiest ways to maintain an idealised image of oneself is to maintain a social distance between oneself and one's audience as the greater the social distance, the greater space the performer has to create and maintain an idealised image. One example of social distance would be the discipline of armies and navies. In the army, the superiors are very distinctly separated from the inferiors which helps to establish an unscrutinized ascendancy in the former. The inferiors are not familiar with their superiors and always have a level of respect between each other which ensures that the superiors are always idealised. When familiar contact is reduced, room to open up about weaknesses and acts that bring about shame are reduced which makes it easy for the inferiors to idealise the superior. Hence, idealisation ensures that the audience is awed by the performer.

One further example given by Goffman to explain this concept is through a conversation between Ponsonby, a naval officer, and the King of Norway, King Haakon. King Haakon believed that to gain popularity, he should spend time among his people. To do so, he believed he should use tramways instead of motor cars. However, Ponsonby strongly objected to this as according to him "familiarity bred contempt". He believed that "The Monarchy was really the creation of each individual's brain. Every man liked to think what he would do, if he was King. People invested the Monarch with every conceivable virtue and talent. They were bound therefore to be disappointed if they saw him going about like an ordinary man in the street.".
Goffman believed that the logical extreme implied in this example, whether it is correct or not, implied that the audience should not be able to directly meet the performer at all as this social distance ensured that the audience looked up to the performer in awe and this generated respect towards the performer.

Hence, through mystification Goffman tries to convey that the easiest way to maintain an idealised image of oneself is by maintaining a distance between oneself and the audience.

Now, I will be passing over the time to Haocheng who will explain the concept behind reality and contrivance.

Haocheng

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Goffman classified behaviors into three classes. First: honest and believable, which means a person is performing honesty and his performance is good enough to be believed by others. Second:not honest and not believable, which means he is performing not honest while his performance is unbelievable to others.Third: not honest and believable: which means the person's performance is carried out successfully, believed by others, with complete dishonesty.

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Goffman also mentions that the conviction of one's performance is independent of whether the actor was being honest. If an actor is performing dishonesty, he can still make his performance believable by acting as if he is being completely honest, in order to convince others. So there is no certain relation between performing honestly and being actually honest. Taking acting on a stage for example, although being a good actor does require good skills and hard practice, anyone can make a good and convincing performance through learning a script and prepare for it well enough. It's same when it comes to real life, an unpracticed players can performed well as long as he has a good script, because life itself is a dramatically enacted thing.

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Next, Goffman says that we do not need thorough training and understanding of a certain character before we are able to portray it.The legitimate performance of everyday life is not like acting on stage in which people can learn what to do in advance and the performer is expected to know how to manage his voice,face and body.It's full of uncertainty and circumstances which we never met before, we may not have enough pieces of expression to fill in our performance of everyday life. However, we know how to perform without rehearsing in advance. It's like we can learn how to lie about something to make others believe us even if we don't know how to do it in the beginning.

Zhi Zhang

Thank you Haocheng. Goffman links the ability of all humans to pick up and learn from others' behaviours and portrayals of their characters to the existence of roles and statuses in society. From this quote, we see that Goffman believes that any person's status in society should not be thought of as a noun that can simply be transferred from one person to another at any time, but rather, as a verb whereby one must constantly uphold the image associated with such a status given by society. An actor's status and position in society, from the eyes of a spectator, is defined by the behaviour and image portrayed by the actor and nothing else. Goffman paints the narrative of a "young American middle-class girl playing dumb for the benefit of her boyfriend"

(pg. 74). Imagine we see such a depiction in real-life, how do we know that the girl is "middle-class" instead of high-class and that she is "playing dumb" instead of being genuinely dumb? We come to such a conclusion by acknowledging that the girl's appearance and clothes matches society's perception of a "middle-class" appearance, and also by mapping the way that the girl conducts herself infront of her boyfriend to our society's preconceived and perhaps chauvinistic notions that a female should not be smarter and assert knowledge over a male in a relationship. Therefore, Goffman states that one's place in society is determined by the way one acts and presents himself/herself in front of others.

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Goffman then goes on to say that if someone appears to be acting very naturally in a way that fits a certain character and role in society, it may seem that the person genuinely is such a character and is being honest with his act. However, this may not be the case, and it is extremely difficult for a spectator to deduce whether a natural act is honest or dishonest. Hence, Goffman argues that through keen observation and effective replication of another character's pattern of behaviour and conduct, one can impersonate and take on the role played by this character convincingly, as the audience will not be able to call his bluff. A real-life example is the case of Frank Abagnale depicted in the movie: Catch Me If You Can. In the movie, Abagnale was able to impersonate as an airline pilot by procuring a pilot's outfit, acquiring knowledge on the terminology and slang used by pilots and aircrews and by mimicking a pilot's charismatic and suave conduct. Most importantly, he convinced himself that he was indeed a pilot and acted like how a pilot would, which convinced everyone around him to grant him all of a pilot's privileges. We can see that since social status and position is merely the upholding of society's image of it, it can be very hard to distinguish whether a person, with natural behaviour, indeed belongs to the portrayed status.

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Apart from giving one identity, a person's status and role in society also imposes a set of responsibilities and expectations which society expects people of this role to fulfill. Goffman argues that once a person has assumed a role in society, he needs to play this role to the fullest because otherwise, the deviation of his action from his role leads to uncertainty and hence, fear from the public. In order to minimize such uncertainty, there are measures in society that seek to prevent a person from escaping his role, and such measures can be seen in everyday life both explicitly in laws and implicitly in culture and communal behaviour. Goffman states that "A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer" and "society demands that he limit himself to his function as a grocer" (pg. 76). Such a limitation can be imposed in the form of frequent checks on the grocer by his supervisor, for example. Hence, a person's role in society is part of a larger amalgamation of various roles played by everyone else, each role with its own expectations imposed by others, and it is the interdependent relationships between members of a society that allows society to function as a whole.

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In conclusion, we can see that misrepresentation and mystification are examples of tools for an actor to contrive a convincing image. To carry out the act of misrepresentation, the actor has to

take care of what they express in order to maintain their fostered impression. An actor can also use mystification to distance himself from his audience and achieve idealization. All in all, if an actor is able to put up a convincing image of a certain character, it will be very difficult for his audience to tell if he is being sincere or bluffing.