**Week 10 Reading Guide – Goffman**

Does the dramaturgical model presented by Goffman suggest that human interaction is basically manipulative?

How does "the presentation of self in everyday life" address the question of how social order is possible?

Nunberg (1981), finds that Goffman brought "a mordant irony to the pretensions and theatricality of everyday interaction'' and had ''considerable gifts for rendering the everyday as bizarre and amusing. ... But Mr. Goffman's moral is very sad because his skepticism is unrelieved. In his catalogues of effects, he finds only the management of impressions; there is rarely an intimation that anything animates our performances beyond the terrible fear of being caught out.” Give a clear outline of Goffman’s main interpretations. To what extent, is Nunberg correct in characterizing Goffman’s Dramaturgical approach as overly sceptical?

**Belief in the part one is playing**

The phenomenal of “backsliding” is fairly common amongst all religions. How can the insights of Goffman explain this? (p.20-21).

**Front**

What are the various “standard parts” of the front? (p.22)

Goffman’s analysis of “anesthesiology” is both biting and revealing about accreditation e.g. ISO 9001. How far do you agree?

**Dramatic realization**

What is this dilemma of expression vs. action?

"Those who have the time and talent to perform a task well may not, because of this, have the time or talent to make it apparent that they are performing well. It may be said that some organizations resolve this dilemma by officially delegating the dramatic function to a specialist who will spend his time expressing the meaning of the task and spend no time actually doing it." (p. 33) How is this quote relevant to your life as a student? Everyone to share a heartfelt tale. Do you think this explains the purpose of University Student Council in general?

**Idealization**

Give examples from your observations about various idealizations at work.

“One of the movie’s [*The Butler*, 2013] great inspirations, as scripted by Danny Strong, is the display of what Cecil calls the “two faces”: the way that a black person must show himself publicly among whites, and the way that he can be among other blacks in private.” In what ways can a close reading of Goffman throw light upon the issue of race and gender both in America and Singapore?

Why do people conceal? (p.43ff.)

Are the reasons presented by Goffman (p. 46-47) adequate in explaining why your degree is 3.5 years?

"we find performers often foster the impression that they had ideal motives for acquiring the role in which they are performing, that they have ideal qualifications for the role. and that it was not necessary for them to suffer any indignities, insults, and humiliations, or make any tacitly understood "deals," in order to acquire the role. (While this general impression of sacred compatibility between the man and his job is perhaps most commonly fostered by members of the higher professions, a similar element is found in many of the lesser ones.)" (p.46) when do you ever see this happening?

**Maintenance of expressive control**

How may miscues be covered up? (p.52-53)

How do various professions upkeep their “standards” in the public (p.55)?

What do you think are the purpose of the standards that are imposed on the female gender? Are the double standards even heavier on female scholars? See “Holland Village streaker keeps A\* Study grant.” (Jul 11, 2009) <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Education/Story/A1Story20090711-154087.html>

**Misrepresentation**

?? [to be filled in by presentation gp] ☺

**Mystification**

“The audience senses secret mysteries and powers behind the performance, and the performer senses that his chief secrets are petty ones. As countless folk tales and initiation rites show, often the real secret behind the mystery is that there really is no mystery; the real problem is to prevent the audience from learning this too..”( p. 70) This sounds awfully like what Mr Ping said in *Kung Fu Panda* (2008), “There is no secret ingredient.” And, of course, the nemesis of Panda, Tai Lung realized belatedly, “The power of the Dragon Scroll is mine! … (gasps) It's nothing!” But are they the same? What’s the differences in intentions? How does it affect the performances? Are similar processes in operation during the episode when the body of LKY was lying in state?

**Reality & Contrivance**

“In short we act better than we know how” (p. 74) How is this related to “anticipatory socialization” (p.72)? Can you explain “[the actor] does this solely because of the effect it is likely to have”(p.73)?

In a West Indies horse possession (p.74) or the US dumb blond act (p.75), and the French waiter posturing (p. 76), Goffman suggests that such performances are a team effort. How is this so? How can the insights of Goffman be invaluable in deciphering the “ingénue” performance of the incumbent Macpherson politician during the recent general election? [use this section to reflect upon Geertz’s cockfight article]

**Good Summaries Online**

[**http://www.soc.duke.edu/~jmoody77/TheoryNotes/Goffman.htm**](http://www.soc.duke.edu/~jmoody77/TheoryNotes/Goffman.htm)

[**http://pubpages.unh.edu/~jds/Goffman17.htm**](http://pubpages.unh.edu/~jds/Goffman17.htm)

[**http://vcampus.uom.ac.mu/soci1101/364\_ervin g\_goffman\_and\_the\_presentation\_of\_the\_self.html**](http://vcampus.uom.ac.mu/soci1101/364_ervin%20%20%20g_goffman_and_the_presentation_of_the_self.html)

**Week 10 Recitation Questions - Goffman**

**Lesson Lead-in:**

*Waiting* is a movie about a day in the life of workers at a casual dining restaurant. This clip can be used to highlight a number of concepts related to Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective. For example, in order to avoid disruption and with hopes of getting a bigger tip, the wait staff go to great lengths to manage the impressions that customers have of them. These "front stage" performances are, however, quite different from the "back stage" interactions between the wait staff and cooks. In a separate vein, the clip also highlights Arlie Hochschild's concept of "emotional labor," a concept which she develops in her book The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Feeling. One can see in the clip how the wait staff must go to great lengths to maintain pleasant appearances in the face of rude and unruly customers.[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. “Waiting – Don’t \*\*\*\* With People That Handle Your Food” [**https://youtu.be/RvVdIg-sTo4**](https://youtu.be/RvVdIg-sTo4)
2. Catch me if you can [2002] Frank becoming a pilot scene **https://youtu.be/5IxKXFHSSKA**

**[Option A] Main Discussion**

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| **Group** | **Gp 1/4** | **Gp 2/3** |
| **News Articles** | •“Holland Village streaker keeps A\* Study grant.” (Jul 11, 2009)  •“A\*Star scientist starts arts grant in protest against six-year bond” (25 Nov 2014)  - "She was the Brightest Bulb in school," (17 May 2015)  - "Cosplay Queen judged contests when she was 18," (04 Dec 2019)  - "The History of Cosplay," (16 Oct 2016) | Speaker of Parliament Michael Palmer resigns over "grave mistake (12 Dec 2012)  •PAP took 'decisive action' once it knew about ex-MP David Ong's case: Chan Chun Sing (13 Mar 2016)  •Ex-Hougang MP Yaw now in Myanmar (10 Jan 2017)  -"The Ugly side of Student politics," (30 Aug 2007)  - "President of USC’s student government resigns on day of his impeachment hearing," (7 July 2020) |
| **Questions** | "And when we observe a young American middle-class girl playing dumb for the benefit of her boy friend, we are ready to point to items of guile and contrivance in her behavior. But like herself and her boy friend, we accept as an unperformed fact that this performer is a young American middle-class girl."(74-75)  What do you think are the purpose of the standards that are imposed on the female gender? (p.39; p.58) Why are the double standards even heavier on female scholars? Are there any possibilities for females to be "avengers", take advantage of the "male gaze" or overturning numerous instances of tiresome "Mansplaining"? | "Those who have the time and talent to perform a task well may not, because of this, have the time or talent to make it apparent that they are performing well. It may be said that some organizations resolve this dilemma by officially delegating the dramatic function to a specialist who will spend his time expressing the meaning of the task and spend no time actually doing it." (p. 33) How is this quote relevant to local politics? Are the burdens unfair for politicians? How is this quote relevant to your life as a student? Everyone to share a heartfelt tale. |

**[Option B] Provide Real life Examples to Goffman’s Categories:**

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| **Category** | **Explanation** | **Examples from News Articles** |
| **Reality &**  **Contrivance** | “[the actor] does this solely because of the effect it is likely to have.”(p.73) |  |
| **@PG** | Sartre: “society demand that he limit himself to his function as a grocer…”(p.76) |  |
| **Mystification**  **@PG** | “in the matter of keeping social distance, the audience itself will often co-operate by acting in a respectful fashion, in awed regard for the sacred integrity imputed to the performer.” (p.69) |  |
|  | Ponsonby: “As a naval officer he would know that the captain of a ship never had his meals with the other officers but remained quite aloof.” (p. 68) |  |
| **Misrepresentation**  **@PG** | “we may have some sympathy for  those who have but one fatal flaw and who attempt to conceal the fact that they are” (p.60) |  |
|  | “an individual may style himself an expert and be penalized by nothing stronger than snigger.” (p.61) |  |
|  | “allow the misinformer to profit from lies without, technically, telling any.” (p. 62) |  |
|  | “With such strategically located points of reticence, it is possible to maintain a desirable status quo in the relationship without having to carry out rigidly the implications of this arrangement in all areas of life.” (p.64) |  |
|  | “both must take care to enliven their performances with appropriate expressions, exclude from their performances expressions that might discredit the impression being fostered,” (p. 66) |  |
| **Maintenance of expressive control** | “especially high-level conflicts, each protagonist will have to watch his own conduct carefully lest he give the opposition a vulnerable point at which to direct criticism.” (p.55) |  |
| Santayana: “Our animal habits are transmuted by conscience into loyalties and duties, and we become “ persons” or masks.” (p.57) |  |
| **Idealization 1** | “influential groups in America whose members have felt that some aspect of every performance ought to play down the expression of sheer wealth In order to foster the impression that standards regarding birth, culture, or moral earnestness are the ones that prevail.” (p.37) |  |
| “American college girls did, and no doubt do, play down their intelligence, skills, and determinativeness when in the presence of datable boys. thereby manifesting a profound psychic discipline in spite of their international reputation for flightiness.” (p.39) |  |
| **Idealization 2** | “ I have been credibly informed that some Brahmins in small companies, have gone very secretly to the houses of Sudras whom they could depend on, to partake of meat and strong liquors, which they indulged in without scruple.” (p. 42) |  |
| “if the principal ideal aims of an organization are to be achieve then it will be necessary at times to bypass momentarily other ideals of the organization, while maintaining the impression that these other ideals are still in force.” (p.45) |  |
| “licensing bodies require practitioners to absorb a mystical range and period of training, in part to maintain a monopoly but in part to foster the impression that the licensed practitioner is someone who has been reconstituted by his learning experience and is now set apart from other men.” (p. 46) |  |
| **Dramatic realization** | “These activities allow for so much dramatic self-expression that exemplary practitioners- whether real or fictional-become famous and are given a special place in the commercially organized fantasies of the nation.” (p.31) |  |
| “Merchants, too, find that they must charge high prices for things that look intrinsically expensive in order to compensate the establishment for expensive things like insurance, slack periods. etc., that never appear before the customers' eyes.” (p.32) |  |

1. Adapted from http://www.thesociologicalcinema.com/videos/category/goffman [↑](#footnote-ref-1)