

Final Essay

Everyone has been in an awkward situation. You get caught doing something wrong, you see a teacher in public, you forget someone's birthday or say the wrong words to a song. We have all felt it. But where do these awkward moments come from? It's understood that these situations just happen and they are unavoidable. You will experience awkward moments no matter what. Although true, there is an explanation for these moments. They don't happen randomly, there are reasons for each one. Goffman argues that each person has roles to perform and when one does not perform, they create awkward situations. Knowing this, it's easier to look at the situations you felt awkward in and look for who was not performing their role correctly.

Your actions in each situation are in turn affecting everyone else's actions. It's these actions and reactions that give people knowledge of how to act in situations. A person can learn their role in different scenarios, allowing for situations to run smoothly.

I teach swim lessons as a part-time job in college and love doing it. Despite the occasional screaming child, most of the kids I teach bring a smile to my face and make it worth it. On the other hand, the parents can make or break the lesson. I have had perfectly good children with controlling or judgemental parents that ruin the whole lesson. My boss tells me that once I put my instructor shirt on, I have the power. I am the one controlling the situation because I was trained for that role. As a swim instructor, my boss encourages me to be confident in whatever I'm doing because the parents don't know what should be happening. Therefore if I forgot one little thing, the parents won't know and I must keep going. Having now been teaching for a few months, I know the flow and rhythm of the lesson and am confident in my ability to teach.

Recently, a little 3-year-old girl came in very excited to swim with her mother accompanying her. She started in the pool and did great for the first 10 minutes. The farther we got, the more she persisted and cried for her mom. The little girl was crying quite a bit which is something I have dealt with in lessons and could handle. In response, the mom decided she would change her role from noninteractive

would come next and how the child would do it. The kid continued to scream as the mother attempted to teach her how to swim with no guidance from me. It was overall a disastrous and pointless lesson for everyone involved.

In this scenario, I am the instructor. My rash guard says so and my training and experience also makes that true. My role is to teach. The kid is the student. Her job was to learn how to swim and focus on that for an hour. The mother is there to observe which means sitting next to the pool and watching the lesson take place. Since the child was over two, the parent is not supposed to get in the pool. With these expectations in place, it was shocking and uncomfortable when the mother came into the water and started teaching the child. This led to an awkward and painfully long lesson. The kid did not learn what she was supposed to because the mother took over the teaching role with no knowledge of how to fill that role.

The idea of having a specific role in life was first articulated by Goffman. Goffman was a sociologist who looked at how social interactions led to the creation of roles. He explained that every interaction you have with someone is a performance. When you are on your front stage, that's when you are performing in these interactions. Within these performances, there is the presence of others which leads to the creation of roles. You find your role through your interactions with other performers. In every situation, you must know the definition. All the performers need to know what type of roles they are playing and the roles others are playing. Each performer must have a mutual investment in the other's performances for them to work together. If one performer looks to undermine others' roles, the performance will fail.

When someone does not perform their role correctly, embarrassing and awkward interactions occur. Others' performance can affect yours and change how you perform your role. For example, if a parent shows up to a parent-teacher conference in a crop top and rolls their eyes at everything said by the teacher, there is going to be a level of awkwardness in that meeting since the parent is not playing the role of a responsible, caring and attentive adult. The teacher's role was discredited as soon as the parent decided to play a different role. To have a smooth and positive performance, the correct roles must be

fails in their role, it not only makes it awkward but also makes it hard for everyone else to play their role.

When the mother came into the pool, she immediately failed to play her role and in turn, kept me from performing mine. It was awkward for me as I did not know how to teach and perform in this scenario. The mother was embarrassed because her child was screaming and crying which again was not the role the child was supposed to play. I knew the definition of the situation I was in and I knew the roles, I, the child, and the mother were supposed to play because I had done this performance countless times. This was the mother and child's first time in this performance so even though they knew what performance they were getting into, they were not aware of how to perform their roles. When the mother didn't play her role, my role as a teacher was discredited and made insignificant. The mom had no investment in my role and through that, ruined every other performer's role.

When the roles were not played correctly, I had to change my role. The mom and child came back the next weekend for a second lesson. I was once again the teacher but went into this lesson knowing what would probably happen. I was able to change my role and teach the mom how to teach the child. This way, I was still the teacher, the kid was being taught and the mom was an active participant instead of an active teacher. The lesson went smoother and was much less awkward. For me, learning roles can take a few tries and I may have to shift my expectations for the situation. Sometimes, roles do not get played correctly but that doesn't mean people can't adjust their roles to make it all work. There must be a mutual working together between all performers to make performances work.

The roles we play in each situation are ever-changing yet very important to the performances we take part in every day. Our roles depend on others and their roles. A smoother interaction occurs when everyone plays their exact role. When a role is played incorrectly, awkward or embarrassing situations occur. It throws everyone off, making it hard for anyone else to play their correct role. So when you encounter an awkward situation, think about the roles being missed and played. Being able to recognize this can help you counteract awkward situations by playing a new version of your role. It's an ever-changing concept that applies to every moment of your life.

