

Our Collective Consciousness is the Context for our Front Stage Self

Sociology is “the systematic study of the development, structure, interaction, and collective behavior of organized groups of human beings,” according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. Several sociologists have different views and opinions on why humans function as we do, why we form social groups, why we act differently around certain groups of people, and why we seem to hide our true selves. Although some of these views may seem like they contrast each other while briefly looking at them from a broad overview, some of the arguments are more alike than one would think. French sociologist, Emile Durkheim argues that the collective consciousness, shared by each of us, tells us how to act. Canadian-American sociologist and social psychologist, Erving Goffman, argues that we have a “front stage self,” which we show others based on what we think they want to see, and a “backstage self,” which we keep for ourselves, and our closest friends. Although these two arguments may not seem to be too much alike, both authors are arguing that in some way, we present ourselves because of how we think others perceive us and because of the contextual script created by our society. We constantly think about what the other people in our group or society would do in our situation, or what they would think of us if we did something.

In the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim’s article, *The Cultural Logic of Collective Representations*, from the book, *The Two Sides of Society*, Durkheim argues that the collective consciousness shared by each of us is the basis of our society and how we act. He furthers his argument by saying that the collective consciousness is a shared narrative of what is external and creates a framework for symbolically interpreting our external domains. For example, in the

becomes part of the “society’s interior life.” Since the universe, or rather the community’s “universe” is only thought of by that society, it becomes part of their interior thoughts and cognitions, forming how they might perceive other things that happen in life. Furthermore, Durkheim states that each society or community is an individual apart from the other societies and communities, explaining that societies are each “a particular subject and consequently particularizes whatever it thinks of.” Durkheim is illustrating that each society contains its own collective consciousness which the people in the community use to perceive and understand what is happening around them. Finally, the author makes the point that we can know “the things which we should seek or from which we should flee,” by using our collective consciousness. Overall, Emile Durkheim is continuously pointing out to the reader that each individual is put into a community or society for a reason, and that is the collective consciousness, which individuals can use to understand what is right or wrong, and what the society will think of certain actions.

Similarly, in the Canadian-American sociologist and social psychologist, Erving Goffman’s article, *Presentation of Self*, in the book *Doubts and Reservations*, Goffman argues that there are two different selves in every person, the “front stage self” and the “backstage self.” For example, Goffman compares every individual’s life to be a constant play, as they are constantly being made aware of the other characters, the scene information, and the audience interpretation, which makes the self “a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented,” while the main concern of every individual is “whether it will be credited or discredited.” The author is trying to communicate that throughout life, individuals are constantly having to perform and read the room to know exactly how they are supposed to act. If the

as weird and unlike the society they are a part of. Furthermore, the author ends the article by writing about how there are certain definitions of situations that must be followed, saying anyone in one of these situations “must expressively sustain a definition of the situation.” Goffman illustrates the idea that there is a simple definition of how people must act in all situations, and every individual must follow that definition to be considered a part of the group. Overall, Goffman is arguing that every situation in life has a situational script, created by the society or community an individual is a part of, and the individuals must participate in these scripts to be considered a part of the society.

Altogether, both Durkheim and Goffman argued that every society creates a way that individuals must act, just through different analogies. Durkheim said that individuals in a society share one collective consciousness, which allows them to know exactly how to act in different situations. Furthermore, Durkheim argued that individuals are aware of the judgment from other members of society, that may come once they complete different actions. Similarly, Goffman argued that there are situational scripts in societies that individuals are expected to follow to remain a part of the community. Both authors illustrated the point that societies create ways in which individuals are supposed to act.