**SOC 3120 Social Psychology**

**Prof. J. Scott Kenney**

**Lecture 7: The Self and Its Social Setting I: The Acquisition and Presentation of Self**

Now that we have reviewed the basic concepts underlying the symbolic interactionist approach to social psychology, we will examine the workings of one of these in more detail. The self is a key concept in S.I.: the process where one becomes an object to oneself. Over the course of the next few classes, we will look at this process in more detail, its outcomes, and its impact on the person’s behavior. We will begin with the formation of self, followed by a closer look at Goffman’s work on the presentation of self in everyday life.

**The Acquisition of Self:**

According to S.I., there is no self at birth, only an organism capable of acquiring self. The newborn does not yet have language, so lacks the developed symbolic capacity for self-designation. Thus, it does not act towards itself as an object, nor is its behavior regulated by a dialogue between the “I” and the “Me”: these lie ahead later.

To be sure, babies are not inert. They have the capacity to respond to events in various ways, such as nursing when hungry, crying when uncomfortable, and responding to the sound, smell and touch of other people. They are capable of - and do - engage in a great deal of learning in their early months. Yet neither their learning nor their behavior is characterized by self-consciousness. Whether their needs are satisfied largely depends on others. Others act towards them in a symbolic fashion, and interpret babies’ sounds as expressions of their needs, yet the actions of the infants themselves are not symbolically organized. What they present to the world is not under *self*-conscious control, but may be *interpreted* that way by others. Any symbolic interaction that goes on is very much one-sided.

Children of age 5 or 6 are remarkably different. They are capable of speech, can dress themselves, feed themselves, use the toilet, etc. They have a far more sophisticated repertoire of conduct and a reasonable degree of control over it. How do such changes come about?

Clearly, physiological and psychological development and growth has occurred. For example, while newborns can do very little, in the first year infants are able to hold their heads up, roll over, sit up, crawl, and, in time, to stand erect and take their first steps. They also learn to coordinate sensory information, and begin to distinguish between themselves and the external world. Through the toddler period and early childhood, additional development and considerable learning takes place.

While cognitive and physical development are crucially important in these years, symbolic interactionists believe that it is the development of self that forms the most crucial aspect of this period of a child’s life. While maturation brings the capacities to serve as a member of the human group, it is the acquisition of self that ties the individual to the group and makes the group a part of the person being created.

**Language and the Self:**

Developing the ability to act toward the self as an object depends on the acquisition of language, for there our symbolic capacity depends. Language is crucial in two ways: (1) It provides the system of names for self and others that enables the individual’s participation in group life as well as the incorporation of group life within the individual. In short, language confronts the child with an organized society of his or her fellow humans. (2) Language provides a vast array of labels for other important objects, bringing the child into contact with the groups’ environment: language confronts the child with culture.

**Learning the Social World:**

Children are born into a social world, an ongoing network of interpersonal relationships among parents, siblings and other kin, and wider circles of others outside the family. Already in existence, this world confronts the child as a massive, natural fact. People in that world are linked to one another in a variety of named role relationships (e.g. parent-child; sister-brother; cousins; friends, etc.). Moreover, not only the relationships are named, so are the individuals (e.g. Daddy is also John, etc.)

This social world confronts the child with an array of objects. While initially having no names for them, the child gradually learns to make sounds, imitate those made by others, and to associate these with particular sensations. Most importantly, they learn the sounds associated with significant others (Ma-ma and Da-da).Two significant discoveries are involved: (1) that things have names. The child becomes aware that there are sounds regularly associated with particular things, including people, and that there are rewards to be earned by learning and using these (e.g. praise, etc.). By about age 1 most children will start to use words, and within the next year begin to develop simple sentences - something we often greet with both excitement and relief (e.g. record words/ glad that “normal”); (2) the child discovers that s/he has a name. Only after this development occurs can it be said that the child has a self. Their name is the child’s way of getting outside his or her perspective and viewing self from the perspectives of others. When the child learns that s/he is the object to which others make reference when they use a certain name, and that s/he can also use that name, the child has made a significant leap toward the acquisition of self.

Yet the mere knowledge of one’s name and the capacity to use it still yields a relatively undifferentiated self. True, s/he now has the capacity to view him/her self as a separate and distinct object among many, and his/her ability to control conduct is enhanced through differentiating body and self from the external world. But this self is still relatively simple, for it can be no more complex than the child’s conception of the social world of which s/he is a part (e.g. Mom/Dad/baby).

Developing a more complex capacity for self-reference involves learning one’s native language and mastering its procedures for referring to self and others. The reality presented to the child by important others, their names and titles is complex and must be deciphered gradually (e.g. their mother and father have more than one name, are addressed in different ways by various people, and may also be referred to by a complicated set of personal pronouns). It isn’t surprising that children at first make many mistakes in their use of pronouns (e.g. referring to self as “you” as others do). Gradually their use of language becomes more grammatically correct (he as subject/him as object), particularly since this comes to reflect a more sophisticated grasp of the complexities of social relationships and the various perspectives from which they may be viewed (e.g., I/me; he/him; she/her; distinguishing fathers, brothers, sisters, etc.).

Among the earliest facts that children learn and incorporate is that the social world is gendered, and that various dyadic terms refer to a fundamental principle of social classification. Gradually, as others act towards them as male or female children, they learn that this classification is important, and in many ways crucial to their membership in society.

Along with increasing accuracy in the use of pronouns, relationship terms, as well as a grasp of sex and age as basic social categories comes an increasingly more complex conception of self. The more the child masters these terms, the better able s/he is to represent these relationships internally - thus incorporating the social world into him/her self. Because s/he can represent others and their perspectives symbolically, the child gains in capacity for self-control while simultaneously becoming more susceptible to social controls. No longer simply an organism that receives care from others and is controlled directly by them, the child becomes an increasingly self-governed entity - representing to him/herself the perspectives of others and taking them into account as s/he constructs conduct. The child becomes more adept at role taking, and, in doing so, becomes a more successful role maker.

**Learning the Culture:**

Acquiring language opens up membership in a group and contact with that group’s world - including the tangible and abstract objects that, taken together, constitute its culture. As the infant moves through childhood, they learn not only the classifications above, but the names of the objects recognized by the group or society to which s/he belongs (e.g. tools, ideas, places, activities, etc.). By learning a common set of objects, children learn a common culture. Some are general to the culture as a whole, others are more specific to their social position in society.

The child learns about the culture’s objects partly by attaching names to things, so that the visible, tangible object within sight or reach can be talked about. Parents can help encourage children’s curiosity. Having grasped the idea that things have names, children soon seek to learn to the names of things they can see.

But this is only one side of this aspect of socialization. It is at least as significant that children learn the “thing of names.” Material things within present reach or view are only a small fraction of the vast world of objects designated by language. Many objects have names, but are not tangible or cannot be immediately apprehended (e.g. “hot,” “no,” “God,” etc.).

The child’s capacity to name and learn the meaning of intangible objects stems partially from the systematic nature of language: that terms can be defined in relation to other terms. This gives us the capacity to designate and interpret words that are unknown to us (e.g. the significance of God as an important object is often expressed through indirect means such as “God is like your father in heaven”).

There is more to learning the meaning of objects than simply being able to talk about them. Fundamentally meaning lies in the actions people take, are prepared to take, or can imagine taking towards objects. To learn the meaning of an object involves all of these things (e.g. “hot” may refer to a variety of actions and things involving danger from heat, act as a synonym for anger or sexual arousal, or to something stolen). The meaning of words expands as the behavioral possibilities associated with that word are discovered.

As the child learns both the names of things and the things of names, s/he comes to grasp each object as presenting several behavioral possibilities. Each can be implicated in a variety of social acts, and a major part of the socialization process entails learning what these are and how tom decide which is most appropriate in a given social situation. Linguistic socialization thus goes far beyond simply learning relations between words, but how these are linked with deeds, objects, and the range of possible social acts in their world. In sum, the child learns to represent the world linguistically, and also how to link the two together.

Learning the meaning of objects applies to the self as much as any other object in the environment. While an object, the self is not grasped intuitively or directly, but through the perspectives of others - in the way that others act towards it. Children learn the thing of this very important name by observing the way that others act towards it, and, gradually, by learning to act towards themselves in the same way.

The child is, after all, an object to other people having, from their perspectives, certain characteristics, abilities, limitations, and natural tendencies. They act toward children by providing care, teaching, discipline, love, etc. This meaning consists of a set of beliefs and attitudes they hold toward the child, and their readiness to act toward the child in certain ways. Thus, whether a child is felt to be strong or weak, intelligent or stupid, wanted or unwanted, will influence how parents act toward it. Such beliefs will shape what they demand of the child, the pattern of rewards and punishments they administer, and what they permit/require the child to do.

Beliefs about a child’s characteristics reflect two major sources: (1) a history of family interaction with the child. Thus while interactions with children may reflect cultural beliefs, each family is unique in its temperament and history of shared activities. Indeed, many families compare children with the background of other family members and draw parallels (e.g. “He’s stubborn like his father”). Such beliefs can be both positive and negative, but nevertheless influence the way parents and others act toward the child, as well as the kind of object the child becomes to itself. (2) The wider culture. Each culture makes the child into a different kind of object at various points in the life cycle, just as culture objectifies men and women in distinctive ways (e.g. as distinct from adults in our culture; as miniature adults in others who need to be moved towards adult responsibilities ASAP). Thus, both the pace of socialization and the kinds of individuals it produces are dependent on cultural definitions of objects as child, childhood, adolescence, male, female, and human nature.

Whether of cultural or family origin, definitions of the child held by important others affect the social treatment accorded the child, as well as the child’s grasp of itself as an object. Self-definitions are powerfully shaped by social definitions. While individuals certainly develop defenses against definitions they don’t like, and acquire some degree of autonomy, people nonetheless generally mean to themselves what they mean to others because they see themselves as they believe others see them.

Not only the person’s capacity for self-control, but the very meaning of the self as object, depends on interaction with others. In particular, it depends on the process of role taking. For the child to learn its own meaning as a social object, it must adopt the perspective of others toward itself. It has to be able to imagine others acting toward itself in various ways and to infer its own meaning to them from these imagined actions, as well as from their real acts. In order to do this, the child needs a grasp of the group or groups of which it is a part, and the various perspectives therein. In short, it must grasp the role structure of the group and use that as a way of imagining the possible actions of others toward it. How does the child develop this capacity?

**Stages of Socialization:**

For a child to fully develop these capacities, s/he must learn who and what may be found in the world and discover how these objects are related to one another. According to Mead, this process takes place in two stages: (1) Play; and (2) the Game.

In the play stage, beginning after the child begins to linguistically designate people and objects, the child plays at various roles made evident by others, their activities, and their use of language (e.g. a mother, father, mail carrier, etc.) Having observed the activities of such persons, the child mimics their words and deeds in play (e.g. imaginary mail is delivered or cakes are baked).

By playing at the roles that important others perform, the child is learning more than just a repertoire of acts associated with these roles, but to have a sense of him/herself in the world. The child is coming to have a sense of self as several possible objects - with specific qualities, capacities, motives and values. Just as the meaning of all objects lies in and shapes acts undertaken toward them, so it is with the self. The play acts of the child toward self shape the meaning of that very crucial object.

Children’s ability to play at roles rests on the fact that the child recognizes particular others who are named, whose activities can be watched and later imitated. Knowledge of their roles is gradually, and in many respects incompletely acquired (e.g. in traditional families, fathers may be known to leave for work and come home, but the content of what they do is less well known - and specifically imitated - than mothers).

In the play stage the child is always responding to and imagining him/herself to be a particular other. The child’s needs are tended to by others, but s/he is generally viewed as incapable of many organized activities and not fully included. For the self to be fully developed, a further stage of development must take place in which the child comes to participate in more organized activities and respond to the self from the standpoint of the generalized other.

This second stage is referred to by Mead as the Game, for the organized game exemplifies what must be done in taking the role of the generalized other. Playing pitcher in the game of baseball requires the child to take the perspective of the team as a whole toward him/herself as a particular player. To conceive of oneself as a catcher, one must have a composite, simultaneous idea of a team, the various positions involved, the object of the game, and the relationship of the catcher’s position to the team as a whole.

It is this constitution of self as object from the vantage point of the generalized other that ultimately gives the self its unity. The child playing at roles is a different self in each instance in which a particular role is assumed. The child in team sports, and later the child who is able to develop a conception of self as a member of a family, community, or workplace, is able to view him/herself as one individual who makes a variety of roles on different occasions in relation to specific others and to society as a whole.

The acquisition of self is hence a sequential process in which each phase makes possible the one that follows. Developing language enables a name for self as object; this enables playing at and taking the roles of particular others; this paves the way for the integration of self in the game stage where the person acquires the capacity to respond to self from the standpoint of the generalized other. As the child gradually develops a fuller sense of the form and content of group activities, s/he also develops a richer sense of self.

It is difficult to attach any specific age levels to the development of self through these stages. Indeed, we are reminded by historians that our conceptions of the child as distinct from the infant or adult is a relatively modern historical creation. Since people have expected different things of children at different ages in different cultures and historical periods, it may be reasonable to argue as well that the rate at which the acquisition of self will occur is more dependent on such expectations rather than developmental factors that have to do with physical maturation (i.e. beyond the earliest stages of neurological development and puberty).

Not everyone who comes into contact with the child has an equal influence on their acquisition of self. As children are dependent on, and generally heavily exposed to them, parents are far more significant in child development than other adults. As such, the structure of the family is not simply grasped as a cognitive construct, but as an emotional hierarchy. Some people are more emotionally important than others, and role-taking in relation to such significant others naturally has a greater impact on the self. These people may include parents, siblings, other extended kin, and, over time, teachers and peers.

The various socializing influences to which the child is exposed in our complex society do not always work harmoniously, nor is the child simply a passive recipient of these. The child is not simply a blank slate, a sponge to soak up what is presented. Rather, opposition between elements (e.g. parents and peers) may itself be a patterned aspect of socialization - particularly as children go into their teens. The power of peer culture among youth often means that children have to select among various socializing influences: emphasizing some and downplaying others.

Hence, socialization is not simply a one-way process where children merely react to what others, such as adults, do. Like people of all ages, children play an important role in their own socialization, sometimes initiating learning experiences. Furthermore, socialization involves much cognitive activity, and children often actively engage in interpretation of what others say and do.

To be a child is to be inquisitive. Sure, societies differ in the degree to which they encourage this, but wanting to understand is part of being a child anywhere. By definition, children have incomplete knowledge, and, schools notwithstanding, much of the initiative for completing it comes from them. They ask questions to learn about their culture and to learn about themselves. They test their limits, the limits of parental rules, expectations, and of socially acceptable conduct.

Looking at the experience of growing up through the eyes of a child, it is clear that much needs to be figured out. Rules are not always so clearly defined as to leave no room for interpretation. The rationale for rewards and punishments is not always fully elucidated. Because much is left to interpretation, the child is more or less constantly in the position of making inferences about the meaning of parental actions (e.g. parents not wanting them to play a lot at a poor child’s house, but not saying why, the child infers this).

Thus, socialization itself is symbolic interaction. Once selfhood has been acquired, with the capacity for role-taking developed, socialization continues on each and every occasion in which the child interacts with others and makes an interpretation of the meanings encountered. In this sense, socialization never really ends, and it is a mistake to think that it is confined to infancy, childhood and adolescence. It only ends with death.

With the acquisition of the capacity for self-reference, we can justifiably speak of the person. Conceptions of the person, and what it may be at different ages, may vary between societies, but the basic fact of personhood is the capacity to experience one’s self as among the objects in the world.

**Goffman and the Presentation of Self”**

*"All the world's a stage,*

*and all the men and women merely players:*

*They have their exits and their entrances;*

*And one man in his time plays many parts."*

-William Shakespeare

As you Like it

The major exponent of the dramaturgical approach in symbolic interactionism, and perhaps the most famous Canadian social theorist, has been Erving Goffman (born in Manville, Alberta in 1922). While studying at the University of Chicago, he encountered Herbert Blumer, among others, and was exposed to the influential ideas of George Herbert Mead. He is well-known for his contributions to the study of total institutions such as mental hospitals, his work on stigma, and his ideas on the "dramatization of evil" which contributed not only to the study of deviance, but to the labelling perspective in particular.

Today, however, we will largely focus on Goffman's main contribution to symbolic interactionist theory, an approach that has come to be known as *dramaturgical sociology*. His point of departure from Blumer and the Chicago school, derived partly from the ideas of philosopher Kenneth Burke, is the central premise that *when human beings interact, each desires to manage the impressions the others receive of him/her.* Using the metaphor of the theatrical performance, Goffman thus argues that when an individual appears before others, he or she will have many motives for trying to control the impressions they receive of the situation. *In effect, each puts on a "show" for the others.* Interactants, either by themselves, or in "teams," give "performances" during which they enact "parts" or "routines." They make use of a "setting" and "props," as well as move back and forth between the "front region" of the "scene" and the "back stage" (hidden from the audience).

According to Goffman, the outcome of each performance is an *imputation* by the audience of a particular kind of *self* to the performed character(s). This *imputation* of self is *as much* or *more* a product of the expressive, ritualistic, or ceremonial elements in the actor's behaviour as of the substantive, practical, or instrumental elements. As he points out "*information about the individual helps to define the situation*, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him." In such circumstances, *it is to the individual's advantage to present him/herself in ways that will best serve his/her ends*. Control is achieved largely by portraying oneself in a manner that influences the *definition of the situation*, thus leading others to act *voluntarily* in accordance with one's own plan. Taking a pragmatic perspective, Goffman asserts that in any case where other individuals act "as if" the individual had conveyed a particular impression, he or she has *effectively projected* a given definition of the situation and the understanding that the imputed state of affairs implies. In Goffman's analysis, then, *the self becomes an object about which the actor wishes to foster an impression*.

Different aspects of this general theme, first developed in his 1959 classic The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, are found throughout his other works. Some of these can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Human beings strive to interact with others in ways that maintain both their own "face" and that of other interactants (“On Face Work”);

2. Deference represents the conveyance of regard and respect, and demeanour provides the means through which the actor creates an image of him/herself for others;

3. The social function of embarrassment resides in the demonstration that the face-losing actor is at least disturbed by it and may prove more worthy another time;

4. Misinvolvements (i.e. ways in which an actor may lose his/her involvement in a conversational encounter) violate the social requirement that interactants must elicit and sustain spontaneous involvement in a shared focus of attention (Behavior in Public Places);

5. Symptoms of mental illness may well be seen as a failure to conform to the tacit rules of decorum and demeanor that regulate interpersonal "occasions" (Asylums);

6. Actors, like gamblers, knowingly take avoidable risks, which represent special opportunities to establish and maintain face;

7. "Role distance" is the discrepancy between the actor's role prescriptions and role performance.

(Encounters).

Significantly, Goffman turned his dramaturgical approach to the study of what he called “total institutions” (e.g. prisons/mental hospitals). These were defined as places of work and residence where large numbers of similarly situated individuals who were cut off from the wider society led an enclosed, formally administered round of life. For Goffman, this was a special type of collectivity - where, through a series of humilitations and degradation ceremonies, the individual’s sense of dignity and worth was stripped away and put in a position of complete dependence on the hierarchical powers of the institution. In his piece “The Moral Career of the Mental Patient” Goffman reviewed what he considered to be the contingencies that transform an individual into a mental patient. In his view, accident plays a major role in the making of a mental patient. Because of some offense, an individual no different from any others on the street finds him/herself facing both family and public servants who operate like a “funnel of betrayal” to incarcerate him or her. Once incarcerated he or she is suddenly and unexpectedly stripped down to the “real self” - having the “cover torn away.” Here, the person “need not seek a new robe and a new audience before which to cover. Instead he can learn, at least for a time, to practice before all groups the amoral arts of shamelessness.” Finally in this regard, in the “Underlife of a Public Institution,” Goffman describes multiple ways in which mental patients cope with the mental institution and work the system to their advantage. He goes further and considers at length the presentations of self by a variety of persons including the blind, members of minority groups, ex-mental patients, ex-convicts, women, the obese, dwarfs, and even childless married couples who engage in impression management to deal with their “spoiled identities.”

In his later work, which revolved around the idea of “Frame Analysis,” Goffman turns back to the analysis of fraud, deceit, con games, and shows of various kinds. In this work, Goffman refers to a “strip” as a slice from the stream of ongoing activity. Frame analysis is such a strip cut from the flow characterized by “definitions of the situation” and made according to principles of organization which govern events and our subjective involvement with them. The basic idea here is that the flow of intersubjective experience is not undifferentiated, but is organized, characterized, and identified by its participants in terms of shared definitions or (in Shutz’ terms) “typifications.” A set of frames established in everyday life is viewed as basic - presumably they are the most shared intersubjective forms of the group - supplying the building blocks of larger patterns of social life. They can be used for fun, deception, experiment, rehearsal, dream, fantasy, ritual, demonstration, analysis, and charity. The basic devices by which they are employed for other than their original function are “keying” (utilizing a set of conventions originating in one area of life to give meaning to activity in another) and “fabrication” (the deliberate use of basic frames for deceit). As a result of keying, complex frames may be viewed as operators and deceivers and those taken in as “dupes, marks, pigeons, suckers, butts, victims or gulls.” Fabrications, of course, are subject to discrediting. Yet, it must be remembered that fabrications may be benign as well as malignant, and sometimes we not only fabricate others but fabricate (i.e. deceive) ourselves.

In his frame analysis, Goffman no longer takes the drama as the sole basic model for social life. Theatrical frames are viewed as a special complex type which he differentiates into stage, movie, and novelistic types. He also discusses what he calls structural issues in fabrications, out of frame analysis and, while defining mental illness as a special type of out of frame behavior, indicates that a frame perspective permits all of us to “generate crazy behavior and to see that it is not all that crazy.”

While frames have been substituted for the theatrical role as the basic unit of social life, Goffman restores in his analysis a parallel to his contrast between front and back stage (an “idealized reality vs. a more grubby real reality”). What one does in everyday life, while real enough in itself, often seems to be a typification laminated over something else of quite uncertain status (e.g. “A famous face who models a famous name dress provides in her movements a keying, a mock-up, of an everyday person walking about in her everyday dress, something, in short, modeled after actual wearings; but obviously she is also a model for everyday appearance while dressed, which appearance is, as it were, always a bridesmaid but never a bride.”) As such, ordinary life is “an imitation of the properties, a gesture of the exemplary forms, and the primal realization of these ideals belongs more to make-believe than to reality.” And, in all this, the self “is not an entity half-concealed behind events, but a changeable formula for managing oneself during them.”

Not surprisingly in our culture, many share Goffman’s view that our civilization is largely an ever-changing panorama of fabrication in which the most basic distinction is between the deceivers and the deceived. The self, in the end, always remains an amoral merchant of morality ever intent on the pillage of others or the avoidance of their pillage by him or her. Goffman, says Martindale, “transformed paranoia and schizophrenia into the norms of everyday life.”

**Theoretical Affinities and Critiques:**

Goffman's work shares some similarities with other schools of thought in symbolic interactionism. For example, like the Chicago school, dramaturgy traditionally emphasizes sympathetic introspection as its chosen methodological orientation, and rejects the conventional assumption that social roles determine the behaviour of Interactants in a simple cause and effect manner. Stressing the calculative and situational behaviour of actors, both approaches remind us that norms, positions, and roles are simply the *frameworks* within which human interaction occurs. However, like the ethnomethodologists, Goffman recognizes that many significant norms tend to escape notice, because they are taken for granted. Hence, he stresses instances in which norms are violated in order to disclose what they are and how they are maintained.

Goffman's predecessors in the symbolic interactionist perspective (e.g. Mead, Dewey, Cooley, Thomas, Blumer, and others) gave no extensive consideration to impression management, insincerity, hypocrisy, or inauthentic self-presentations. Indeed, his work rivetted reader's attention to the human capacity for self-reflectivity in a much more compelling fashion than his predecessors. His analysis advances, in effect, a significant reconstruction of the image of human beings offered in symbolic interactionism.

However, Goffman's approach has been criticized on theoretical, methodological, and ideological grounds. For example, with regard to the first two, Meltzer, Petras and Reynolds argue that his work contains:

"...no explicit theory, but a plausible and loosely-organized frame of reference; little interest in explanatory schemes, but masterful descriptive analysis; virtually no accumulated evidence, but illuminating allusions, impressions, anecdotes, and illustrations; few formulations of empirically testable propositions, but innumerable provocative insights. In addition, we find an insufficiency of qualifications and reservations, so that the limits of generalization are not indicated."

Others, such as Collins and Makowsky, question Goffman's notion of the functional necessity of "performances" in the maintenance of social order given the increasing informality of modern interpersonal relationships and the erosion of rank in contemporary American society. Blumer criticizes Goffman on the basis that he focuses on the "narrowly constructed area" of face to face association "with a corresponding exclusion of the vast mass of human activity falling outside of such association." In Blumer's view, this is coupled within Goffman's study of face to face association to the study of personal positioning at the cost of ignoring what the people are *doing*. Essentially, Blumer is arguing that the dramaturgical approach theoretically ignores the macrocosm within which its micro-level concerns are imbedded. Similarly, it overlooks the actual *substantive content* of human encounters in its concern exclusively with the expressive forms of encounters. According to Blumer, the resultant image of the human condition is a truncated, partial one.

Similarly, Bob Prus asserts that the dramaturgical perspective Goffman presents suffers from its inattentiveness to the ways in which the *task or accomplishment aspects of action* are conducted on a day to day, moment to moment basis. Once one moves beyond a consideration of the ways in which impression management ("looking good") is achieved in interpersonal contexts, Goffman's work is of limited value in appreciating how human activity is achieved in practice. According to Prus, "to understand how one manages or performs tasks, builds relationships, acquires perspectives, and the like, one must turn more squarely to the symbolic interaction of Herbert Blumer and studies that have been developed in Chicago-style ethnography."

Moving beyond matters of theoretical and methodological scope, many also go on to criticize Goffman on more ideological grounds. Gouldner, for example, emphasizes how modern men and women frequently depend on, and are integrated into with large-scale bureaucratic organizations over which they can have little influence; individuals whose sense of worth and control is impaired, and who thus bend their efforts to the management of impressions that will maintain or enhance status. Gouldner thus characterizes Goffman's dramaturgy as "a revealing symptom of the latest phase in the long-term tension between the middle-class's orientation to morality and its concern with utility." So constrained, with their faith in either seriously undermined, the new middle class endeavours to "fix its perspective in aesthetic standards, in the appearance of things."

Indeed, to many commentators, Goffman's scheme of imagery suggests a sordid, disenchanting view of humans and their society, one marked by both duplicity and despair. Such commentators contend that Goffman's view celebrates both the subordination of reality to appearance and morality to opportunism. Some terms that have been used include the human being as "an a-moral merchant of morality", or a "detached, rational impression manager." Cuzzort simply calls Goffman's conception "humanity as the big con."

Summing up, Goffman's dramaturgical approach, with its emphasis on self-presentation and impression management, has made a major impact in symbolic interactionism in a direction that had only been hinted at before. Nevertheless, it has also been criticized as too narrowly-focused theoretically and methodologically, and as presenting an unflattering picture of human nature.

Contrary to popular belief, dramaturgical sociology did not begin and end with the work of Erving Goffman. Indeed, other theorists, both of the period and since, were inspired by Goffman's approach and applied it to the study of motivation (e.g. Marvin Scott and Stanford Lyman's classic examination of "Accounts"; John Hewitt and Randall Stokes' work on "Disclaimers;" Laurie Taylor’s work on the use of rhetoric in motivational analysis; and Candace Clark’s discussion of “emotional micropolitics”. The first two relate to Goffman's statement that "Preventative practices are constantly employed to avoid embarrassments and corrective practices are constantly employed to compensate for discrediting occurrences that have not been successfully avoided." Taylor’s work stresses how to fully understand human motivation and motives, we have to attend to rhetorical means of persuasion (both of self and of other), both of which involve self-presentation. Finally, Clark’s work points out how emotions can be used as tools in self-presentation to convey an impression or to secure a goal. These are but a few of the many subsequent theoretical directions inspired by Goffman’s dramaturgical sociology.