

Erving Goffman

past president of the American Sociological Association

Introduced and/or developed a number of influential sociological concepts

Durkheim has helped develop the micro-sociological perspective.

This perspective allows sociologists to look more closely at why people act as they do.

Goffman Studied Delinquent behavior as a way of understanding social norms —that is normally expected behavior

What are some causes of delinquency?

Labeling Theory

Goffman Studied the behavior of people in asylums.

He found that the patients "learned how" a mentally ill patient is expected to behave.

Goffman developed the term "total institution". What is this?

An institution that provides 24 hour training (asylums, prisons, boot camp)

Like a number of other sociologists Goffman believed that:

alone the person would be an animal

the self is a reflection of the responses of others

Reality is constructed by the individuals that make up the reality

If reality is constructed by the individuals that make up the reality,

why haven't we created the ideal reality?

How might the answer be related to Freud's "Id" and Superego?

To Marx's view of humanity?

To deTocqueville's view of the aristocracy?

To Spencer's biological view?

To Nietchi's view of the human will?

To Simmel's "invisible world"?

After observing how people try to "perform" certain ways, Goffman created:

The Theatrical  
(or dramaturgical)  
Model of Social Life

He introduced the idea of the "front stage" and "back stage."

How would you guess he applied these terms?

Goffman introduced the idea of

impression management—attempting to manage how others will define the situation.

Goffman defined Embarrassment as a situation where the presentation of self contradicts the situation.

Provide an example that fits this definition?

Goffman defined Stigma as the difference between what one ought to be and what one actually is.

Can you think of an example of stigma?

### How is life like a "play"?

- people can control how others see them
- people know what to expect from others
- allows for shared understanding

Durkheim talked about the collective conscious while Goffman demonstrated the collective conscious through the symbolic realities people share.

Such as the silence of a church communion

Goffman understands reality as negotiable.

How can this be?

Our existing reality is only what we collectively believe it to be.

Goffman believed the closest we can get to "reality" is to understand how and why people construct their reality as they do.

This is the purpose of ethnomethodology.

Goffman believed that social order is a symbolic reality

It exists only as long as it is believed in, and it changes as people struggle to shift those beliefs to their own advantage.

Can you think of an example?

Desertion in a war  
"Run on the bank"  
Revolutions

Goffman is viewed by some as a functional theorist

- "ceremony" and "social rules" have the function of creating social order
- if something exists in society it must be serving a function

Why isn't Goffman considered a conflict theorist?

Goffman doesn't consider how some "define the situation" so it benefits them;

he is interested in how the social order is created and maintained.

What did Collins mean by the following?

Human beings *create* their own actions and their meanings and construct new realities where none existed before (p.241).

Thank You.