

Goffmans dramaturgical approach essay



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Goffman's Dramaturgical approach theory was inspired by William Shakespeare's writings in which Shakespeare says "totus mundus agit histrionem," which are Latin for "All the world is a theatre". In his theory, Goffman views individuals as actors in society where "interactions are viewed as performances" (Barnhart, A. D. ,) the individual attempts to create an impression on the world in which these impressions "exist regardless of the mental state of the individual" (Barnhart, A. D.,) meaning, how the individual acts is not entirely voluntary but also involuntary.

Social structure refers to "the people in a society considered as a system organized by a characteristic pattern of relationships" (the free dictionary) To explain social structures using aspects of his theories would incline us to look more into social interactions and how an individual conducts themselves when confronting other human beings. Goffman's theory has two stages, the "front stage" and the "back stage" (Barnhart, A. D. ,); The former being where the individual sets impressions on society or creates a character of themselves that they would want society to know them by, the later being the true self where we practise how to conduct ourselves in social interactions and relax from all the "acting" (Barnhart, A. D. ,). These two aspects of his theory are where this essay will focus on. In the Family one may refer to a shona proverb "chakafukidza dzimba matenga" meaning what is in the home is covered by the roof.

From this the shona culture is attempting to explain that what you see on "stage" in certain families is not the reality. This proverb explains how many will not allow people to see their problems and will rather act so that society believes they are of a certain kind. This reveals Goffman's theory of

dramatization as applicable to social structures such as family in that they act in a certain way to con or deceive the masses into thinking of them in a certain manner- impression management (Barnhart, A. D. ,).

In religion, priests are expected to act as the alpha of their church. The paradoxical role they are expected to play as leader and servant of the people is not always defined in this ideal manner. However, when given the position, priests are expected to conduct their behaviour as a standard bearer, giving the followers in the church an idea of themselves which is almost unattainable.

These social con artists not only attempt to teach you on the gospels and other Biblical teachings but also attempt to sell themselves and their confidence in order to retain the congregations support furthermore to gain support from non-believers while preserving the image of their position, status and church. When these priests preach we understand the religious social structure through Goffman's impression management (Barnhart, A. D. ,) aspect that one may create impressions of themselves on people not only for their own image but for the wellbeing of the church which explains the security many feel over an idea of a person and not necessarily the individuals themselves.

This impression also has an effect on the church as an individual in that, the church appears as holy because its leaders are holy. Martin Luther King, famous for several speeches such as " I have a dream", changed many perceptions on race. His endeavours to end racial and ethnic inequalities in the USA in his time saw to many other " black" people taking a stand for

equality. Because of the risk he took to vocalise his opinions on the inequalities in the USA his “performed” self (Barnhart, A. D. ,) encouraged many to also retaliate the stereotypical views imposed by the white people.

These petitions to end slavery and oppression of the black people gave confidence to other heroes such as Nelson Mandela, in Apartheid South Africa. In Law, we see how during Apartheid South Africa, the Boers feeling inferior wanted to exert their dominance over the African majority (Manning. P. ,). By instilling fear, they would be able to exploit the masses into being their slaves and obeying their command. These Afrikaans men and women to maintain social order ensured that there would be boundaries set on the Africans in not only educating them but also where they were permitted to go.

Highlighted in this society is the bourgeoisie exploiting the proletariat, through laws and regulations the Boers were able to control the Africans who not only till the early 90's managed to keep the latter under their command, fearful of the repercussions of breaking the law. Each Boer was obliged to act harshly to the Africans in order to keep their position as the elite in society. This in a way was the black minority self monitoring their behaviour collectively because they are aware of their social situations(Barnhart, A. D.); they prior to the ideas of retaliating conformed due to self fulfilling that they had been taught to be less than the Boers. In politics, when viewing social structures influenced by an individual's actions in the front stage, we think of regimes such as that of Hitler post World War 2 and during it. Adolf Hitler as an actor conducted his behaviour in public places at an authoritative position. He had the ability to not only indoctrinate the minds of military

personnel and Germans, but also the ability to persuade in the public places, other individuals to adopt his policies and ideals on what a true German should be (Aryan).

He developed policies that had to do with the superiority of the German's and the inferiority of minorities such as Blacks, and Jews. His ideas also influenced the army and educational facilities where he indoctrinated children and troopers to attack or destroy the inferior minorities that seemed to pollute and threaten their perfect race. His charisma in speeches and his articulate presentation of ideas hypnotised the Germans. His acting on stage influenced thousands of people to collectively conform without question to his ideas.

The Germans behaviour also tallied with the Self Enhancement and Ingratiation because in spite of their individual beliefs, the majority of Germans conformed to the theories of the Fuhrer in order to be seen in favourable light. Recently in USA the world was allowed to see beyond the front stage of the United States government. When Snowden disclosed the black budget of \$52. 6 billion in the USA (RT. com) in breach of the self disclosure that the USA had; bringing to the front stage what the USA preferred to keep in the backstage and potentially causing rebellion from the people.

Many countries use the act of censorship, concealing what could cause uproar and only revealing the information that is necessary to their people this is because when certain secrets of the self that an individual, in this case the state, may not want people to know of, the image that this individual

worked hard to create (Kivisto. P. , Pittman. D. ,) Such an act as done by Snowden does not allow the USA to explain the cause of these hefty amounts of money on clandestine spy programs.

These allegations not being denied changed the perceptions of the Americans on their government In crime and deviance there is dark figure crime where certain crimes such as domestic abuse against men and abortion are unrecorded. The police task force fail to record these crimes because they are unreported or are not considered as crimes worthy of report, or even to protect the people and preclude certain statistical information on crime from raising moral panic. This in relation to Goffman's dramaturgical approach can be viewed as the police being the person and the " dark figure" crime being the back staged self (Barnhart, A. D. ,).

Just as an ex-convict would not want people to know s/he is an ex-convict in order to avoid raising alarm, the police ignore certain crime in attempts to make an impression that they have the crime situation under control. If they are to be blunt about the backstage, they could potentially lose the confidence of the public or could be undermined further jeopardising the image of the police task force. In conclusion Goffman's Dramaturgical approach can explain social structures through societies that can be viewed as an individual. These social structures follow the tactic of the different " self" as depicted by Goffman.