UE 4

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SOCL: Sociological Theory

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Erving Goffman was a Canadian sociologist who was known for many different things. According to Arlene Daniels, Goffman was “one of the very few sociologists whose work was known beyond the field, and he influenced the world” (Daniels, 1983). According to Joshi Madhura, Goffman looked at social life through an interactionist approach which was based on self and society and that they are created and recreated during interactions. Some of the more well-known things that he is known for include symbolic interactionism and the study of face-to-face interaction. Goffman was very interested in dramaturgy. According to the video by Sociology Live in 1959, Goffman introduced the idea of dramaturgy.  According to the PowerPoint in class, Goffman’s approach to this was to view social life as a theoretical performance, this is where individuals are seen as actors on a stage.

Where we act a certain way depending on the context. According to Goffman, there are three different premises to dramaturgy the first premise is we only view a person’s self by what they show us, and it isn’t a material object. The second premise is impression management which is slanting your presentation of self to create distinctive appearances and satisfy audiences. The third premise is certain features of face-to-face encounters often create order and stability in social interactions. There are two different stages when looking into this. The front stage and the backstage, the front stage is costumes, settings, actors, scripts, etc. The backstage is preparation, research, practice, evaluation, etc. When looking into social interactions Karen Sternheimer states, “For Goffman, social interactions were largely “front stage” and in public spaces: working and being in school typically happens in places where we might carry ourselves differently than we would at home” (Sternheimer, 2020). With technology coming along front stage has started to take place where we were used to considering backstage. Goffman’s work was able to show us that social interactions are not unorganized chaos.

Erving Goffman had many different theoretical contributions. Goffman's most influential contribution was with the dramaturgical model. He explained this model as a theater for him to describe social interaction. With this model, he views people as actors on a stage, with social life being many different performances. Goffman was also very well known for front stage and backstage. Front stages are the way people interact with an audience, so I think of this as how people act when they’re at a party. Backstage is the way people act when they are at home so when things are more private. This is where people can be themselves and don’t need to put up a front for people to like them. Goffman had many different views on face-to-face interaction as well. He would investigate nonverbal communication and gestures, and how symbols are used in everyday encounters. When I think about this, I think about how people give head nods and wink, etc. Goffman also investigated impression management which is the way individuals control and manipulate the things they give to other people. When I think about this, I think about how people may manipulate someone into believing something even though it may not be true. Goffman also investigated total institutions which he believes to be where individuals are under a lot of social control, and they have their life tightly regulated. Some different ways that this could be seen are in prison, barracks, or somewhere where you have to follow strict rules and if you don’t then there will be consequences.

When looking at how Goffman’s work has been used to understand society today, I start with social interaction and communication, with the roles of symbols in communication being very prevalent in the age of digital communication and social media. Goffman can help people get through complex online interactions where the way people present themselves can be different over the phone or in person. When looking at most of Goffman's most prevalent theoretical contributions in the social world I think they all connect to digital media because many of Goffman's ideas have to do with social interaction and they people act when they are at home or when they are out in public. As I mentioned earlier with front stage and backstage interactions the front stage interaction has started to become a very prevalent thing in the backstage interaction because people have so much online communication. I feel that ever since covid this has happened very often. People are now working from home, doing school at home, having meetings at home, etc. People are now feeling more comfortable showing themselves in their front-stage interactions backstage because so many people are starting to do this. When looking at total institutions from a digital age standpoint this is where people undergo strict social control. So, when schools are putting a block on the things that you can look at this is a total institution putting strict control on the things you can look at.

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