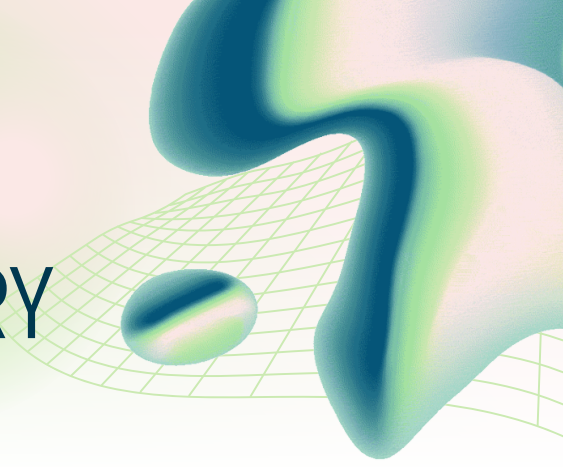


# UNDERSTANDING GOFFMAN'S DRAMATURGICAL THEORY

Life as a Stage



## Introduction

Ever feel like you're playing a role in your daily life? Erving Goffman, a renowned sociologist, believed that social interaction is indeed a performance, much like a play on a stage. His dramaturgical theory, introduced in his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, offers a fascinating lens through which to understand how we manage impressions and present ourselves to others. This blog post will explore the key concepts of Goffman's theory and provide practical tips on how to apply these insights to create a more authentic and fulfilling lifestyle.

## Key Concepts of Dramaturgical Theory

Goffman's theory revolves around several core concepts:

*Goffman uses a play as an example to describe his theory:*

- **Frontstage:** This is where the performance takes place. It's the setting where we actively manage impressions and present ourselves in a specific way
  - Think of an actor portraying a specific character to an audience
- **Backstage:** This is a more private space where we can relax, prepare for our performance, and be ourselves without the pressure of maintaining a specific image
  - This is where the actors may be discussing the audience or other actors backstage, not in front of the audience
- **Impression Management:** This refers to our conscious or unconscious efforts to control how others perceive us
  - We use various strategies, such as our appearance, language, and behavior, to create a desired impression
  - We mimic others' body language to become more likable
- **Face:** Our 'face' is the positive social value we claim for ourselves. It's the image we want others to accept.
  - Social interactions often involve maintaining our own face and helping others maintain theirs
  - Goffman uses the example of someone being caught in a lie and will therefore lose 'face'
- **Setting:** This refers to the physical layout and scenery that frames the social interaction. This helps dictate the kinds of performances that will take place.

Goffman does not believe we have a true existential self or "soul". Instead, he believes we are a creation of all that is around us and done to us. Society has developed a frontstage and backstage, and therefore we have accepted

this and continue to act in accordance to society's standards and norms.

## Applying Dramaturgical Theory to Improve Your Life

While Goffman's theory might seem purely academic, it offers valuable insights for improving our relationships, communication, and overall well-being.

*Here's how you can apply these ideas in your daily life:*

### Insights

#### Self-Awareness:

- Understand your different 'fronts' and hone them individually

#### Authenticity:

- Minimize the gap between your frontstage and backstage selves
  - This creates less room for inauthentic behavior and actions to take root

#### Empathy:

- Recognize that everyone is performing
  - Your strict and controlling boss was brought on for that exact role; however, they may also embody the qualities of a nurturing mother

#### Mindfulness:

- Be present in your interactions
  - Understand what role you should be playing and if you may be stepping out of that role
  - You can have more control over the situation if you are aware of what self you should embody
    - For example: When speaking to a new co-worker should you be your co-worker self or friend self?

#### Boundary Setting:

- Protect your 'backstage' and personal space
  - Using the example before:
    - Do not quickly jump to your backstage self with a co-worker who may not have good intentions

### Practical Tips

- Reflect on your roles: Identify the different roles you play (e.g., parent, employee, friend) and how your behavior changes in each role
  - What aspects of yourself do you emphasize or suppress?
- Embrace vulnerability: Gradually reveal more of your 'backstage' self to trusted individuals
  - Sharing your authentic thoughts and feelings can deepen connections and foster intimacy
- Practice perspective-taking: Try to understand the 'performance' of others
  - What 'face' are they trying to maintain
  - What pressures might they be facing?
- Cultivate presence: Pay attention to your body language, tone of voice, and the words you use in your interactions
  - Are you projecting the image you intend?
- Create healthy boundaries: Designate specific times and spaces for relaxation and self-care
  - This allows you to recharge and maintain a sense of personal identity outside of your social roles
  - Constantly being frontstage can create a lack of sense of self

By applying these principles, you can become more conscious of your social performances and make intentional choices about how you present yourself to the world.

This can lead to more genuine connections, reduced stress, and a greater sense of personal fulfillment.

## Creating a More Holistic Lifestyle

Goffman's theory highlights the inherent performativity of social life. Recognizing this can free you from the pressure of perfection and allow you to embrace your imperfections.

*Here's how dramaturgical theory can contribute to a more holistic lifestyle:*

- **Reduced self-criticism:** Acknowledge that everyone makes mistakes and experiences 'face-threatening acts'. Be kinder to yourself and others when things don't go as planned.
- **Increased self-acceptance:** Embrace the different aspects of your personality and recognize that it's okay to adapt your behavior to different contexts.
- **Improved communication:** By understanding the dynamics of impression management, you can become a more effective and empathetic communicator.
- **Greater authenticity:** Strive to align your 'frontstage' and 'backstage' selves as much as possible. This will create a greater sense of integrity and inner peace; however, continue to keep your boundaries in place

## Conclusion

Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory offers a powerful framework for understanding the complexities of social interaction. By applying its core concepts, you can gain valuable insights into your own behavior and the behavior of others. This understanding can empower you to create more authentic connections, manage impressions effectively, and live a more fulfilling and holistic life.

So, step onto the stage with confidence, embrace your roles, and strive to be the best version of yourself, both on and off stage.

## Contact Information

Thank you for reading this exploration of Erving Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach. If you would like to discuss these ideas further or have any questions, please feel free to reach out.

I welcome feedback and diverse perspectives as I continually seek opportunities for growth and new insights. Please ensure all comments are respectful, particularly when offering critiques or dissenting opinions.

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