



**ERVING "IF MEN DEFINE SITUATIONS AS REAL,
THEY ARE REAL IN THEIR CONSEQUENCES" GOFFMAN**



Over the years I have found [Professor Goffman](#)'s sociological analysis of stigma management to be valuable, even unique in its value. [Allan Bennett](#), a British playwright, put it this way:

"Much of Goffman could be a commentary on Kafka. ...the truth one finds in Goffman's work is the truth one goes to fiction for."

I note however, that according to another sociologist, [Charles Lemert](#), a scholar who has been described as "the preeminent social theorist in America,"

"In his day (a short one of barely two decades, from about 1960 when his books were first widely noticed until his death in 1982), Goffman's proper name had become an improper word."

THE GOFFMAN READER

1922

June 11, Sunday: [Erving Goffman](#) was born in Canada, a Jew. (At birth he was even shorter than he would be as an adult.)

1943

[Erving Goffman](#) matriculated at the University of Manitoba, where he would be exposed to the thought of [Alfred North Whitehead](#).

1945

[Erving Goffman](#) graduated from the University of Toronto.



1951

[Erving Goffman](#)'s "Symbols of Class Status."

1952

[Erving Goffman](#)'s "On Cooling the Mark Out: Some Aspects of Adaptation to Failure."

1953

[Erving Goffman](#) completed his graduate work in sociology at the University of Chicago by studying the manner in which the staff of a Shetlands hotel was reacting to the hotel's clientele. Out of this study "Communication Conduct in an Island Community" would eventuate his THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE, which would first see publication in 1956 in Scotland simply because that was where the hotel in question happened to have been located (the author's terminology reveals that he had been influenced by a careful reading of [Alfred North Whitehead's](#) 1929 [PROCESS AND REALITY](#)).

1956

[Erving Goffman's](#) THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE (Edinburgh, Scotland).



1957

[Erving Goffman](#) became a member of the Department of Sociology of the University of California – Berkeley.

1959

[Professor Erving Goffman's](#) THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE (Edinburgh, Scotland).





THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Adam D. Barnhart

[Erving Goffman](#)'s *THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE*, published in 1959, provides a detailed description and analysis of process and meaning in mundane interaction. Goffman, as a product of the Chicago School, writes from a symbolic interactionist perspective, emphasizing a qualitative analysis of the component parts of the interactive process. Through a microsociological analysis and focus on unconventional subject matter, Goffman explores the details of individual identity, group relations, the impact of environment, and the movement and interactive meaning of information. His perspective, though limited in scope, provides new insight into the nature of social interaction and the psychology of the individual.

Goffman employs a “dramaturgical approach” in his study, concerning himself with the mode of presentation employed by the actor and its meaning in the broader social context (1959, 240). Interaction is viewed as a “performance,” shaped by environment and audience, constructed to provide others with “impressions” that are consonant with the desired goals of the actor (17). The performance exists regardless of the mental state of the individual, as persona is often imputed to the individual in spite of his or her lack of faith in — or even ignorance of — the performance. Goffman uses the example of the doctor who is forced to give a placebo to a patient, fully aware of its impotence, as a result of the desire of the patient for more extensive treatment (18). In this way, the individual develops identity or persona as a function of interaction with others, through an exchange of information that allows for more specific definitions of identity and behavior.

The process of establishing social identity, then, becomes closely allied to the concept of the “front,” which is described as “that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” (22). The front acts as the a vehicle of standardization, allowing for others to understand the individual on the basis of projected character traits that have normative meanings. As a “collective representation,” the front establishes proper “setting,” “appearance,” and “manner” for the social role assumed by the actor, uniting interactive behavior with the personal front (27). The actor, in order to present a compelling front, is forced to both fill the duties of the social role and communicate the activities and characteristics of the role to other people in a consistent manner.

This process, known as “dramatic realization” (30), is predicated upon the activities of “impression management,” the control (or lack of control) and communication of information through the performance (208). In constructing a front, information about the actor is given off through a variety of communicative sources, all of which must be controlled to effectively convince the audience of the appropriateness of behavior and consonance with the role assumed. Believability, as a result, is constructed in terms of verbal signification, which is used by the actor to establish intent, and non-verbal signification, which is used by the audience to verify the honesty of statements made by the individual. Attempts are made to present an “idealized” version of the front, more consistent with the norms, mores, and laws of society than the behavior of the actor when not before an audience (35). Information dealing with aberrant behavior and belief is concealed from the audience in a process of “mystification,” making prominent those characteristics that are socially sanctioned, legitimating both the social role of the individual and the framework to which the role belongs (67).



STIGMA

ERVING GOFFMAN

[Erving Goffman](#) explores nature of group dynamics through a discussion of “teams” and the relationship between performance and audience. He uses the concept of the team to illustrate the work of a group of individuals who “co-operate” in performance, attempting to achieve goals sanctioned by the group (79). Co-operation may manifest itself as unanimity in demeanor and behavior or in the assumption of differing roles for each individual, determined by the desired intent in performance. Goffman refers to the “shill,” a member of the team who “provides a visible model for the audience of the kind of response the performers are seeking,” promoting psychological excitement for the realization of a (generally monetary) goal, as an example of a “discrepant role” in the team (146). In each circumstance, the individual assumes a front that is perceived to enhance the group’s performance.

The necessity of each individual to maintain his or her front in order to promote the team performance reduces the possibility of dissent. While the unifying elements of the team are often shallower and less complete than the requirements of performance, the individual actor feels a strong pressure to conform to the desired front in the presence of an audience, as deviance destroys the credibility of the entire performance. As a result, disagreement is carried out in the absence of an audience, where ideological and performance changes may be made without the threat of damage to the goals of the team, as well as the character of the individual. In this way, a clear division is made between team and audience.

[Erving Goffman](#) describes the division between team performance and audience in terms of “region,” describing the role of setting in the differentiation of actions taken by individuals (107). Extending the dramaturgical analysis, he divides region into “front,” “back,” and “outside” the stage, contingent upon the relationship of the audience to the performance. While the “official stance” of the team is visible in their frontstage presentation, in the backstage, “the impression fostered by the presentation is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course,” indicating a more “truthful” type of performance (112). In the backstage, the conflict and difference inherent to familiarity is more fully explored, often evolving into a secondary type of presentation, contingent upon the absence of the responsibilities of the team presentation. To be outside the stage involves the inability to gain access to the performance of the team, described as an “audience segregation” in which specific performances are given to specific audiences, allowing the team to contrive the proper front for the demands of each audience (137). This allows the team, individual actor, and audience to preserve proper relationships in interaction and the establishments to which the interactions belong.

THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE, though detailed, does not provide a comprehensive description of interactive processes. In exploring the construction of presentation among individual and teams, Goffman does not fully explore the nature of marginalized individuals, the importance of ritual or ceremony in the dramaturgy, or the construction of character. A reading of these complementary notions from Goffman’s later work, including STIGMA and INTERACTION RITUAL, provides a vehicle for expanding the analysis of the interaction of everyday life into the broader experiences of human interaction.

The pressure of idealized conduct is most clearly seen in marginalized people, whose deviance forces them into “discredited” or “discreditable” groups, based on the nature of their stigma (Goffman 1963, 42). The importance of impression management is most visible with these individuals, as those who are discredited must assuage the tension their stigma causes in order to successfully interact with others, while those suffering from a discrediting stigma are forced to limit the access of others to information about the stigma or assume the character of a discredited individual. The emphasis on idealized, normative identity and conduct limits the ability of the discredited individual to achieve full acceptance by the population that he or she is forced to assimilate into.

For the discreditable individual who attempts to “pass” and employ “disidentifiers” to establish him/herself as “normal” (44), feelings of ambivalence and alienation emerge as a result of limited social intercourse. Ultimately, the existence of a stigma of any type, a part of the existence of a large segment of the population, changes the nature of impression management and, hence, interaction.



In his essay “Face Work,” from *INTERACTION RITUAL*, [Erving Goffman](#) expands on the concept of the “line,” originally employed in *THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE*, dealing with the definition of line in terms of ritualized, symbolic action (Goffman 1967, 4). Symbol, as with the three types of symbolic imagery described in *STIGMA*, stigma symbols, prestige symbols, and disidentifiers (Goffman 1963, 43-44), assume a more abstract location in the communicative process, a reification of verbal cues. The face reflects the line imputed by others, regardless of cognizance of its existence, to the actor, based on the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, either affirming or denying a social construct. In this way a means of locating the actor in the interactive process and the broader society, allowing Goffman to affirm George Herbert Mead’s argument that identity is constructed through an understanding of the projection of the self to others.

The vehicle for the construction of the character and identity can be seen in Goffman’s article “Where The Action Is.” The emphasis on the movement between social spaces, similar to his discussion of audience segregation and the “presence of third parties” (42), underscores the importance of the recreation of the self in different environments. To fully define the self, Goffman argues, involves performance in voluntary, consequential action, which is not fully available in everyday life. As a result, individuals are drawn to activities that involve risk-taking, such as gambling and bullfighting. Ultimately, the experience of action may become more important than social perception in defining character. As Goffman states: “Although fateful enterprises are often respectable, there are many character contests and scenes of serious action that are not. Yet these are the occasions and places that show respect for the moral character. Not only in mountain ranges that invite the climber, but also in casinos, pool halls, and racetracks do we find worship; it may be in churches, where the guarantee is high that nothing will occur, that the moral sensibility is weak (268).”

In this sense, Goffman depicts extraordinary circumstances as a means of developing the character central to the experience of everyday life. Through an investigation of his work in a broader context, the relationship between the forces that shape society and the individual becomes more clear.

While Goffman’s symbolic interactionist orientation situates him well in developing an understanding of microsociological function, it provides only a cursory exploration of the larger institutions and processes of society. Despite this emphasis, *THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE*, is a work that lends itself well to a macrosociological reading. By placing Goffman’s work in the context of the writings of other thinkers, a beneficial link between the micro- and macro-structures of society becomes visible.

An important link may be made between Goffman and Durkheim may be made in an inquiry into the concept of “spontaneity.” In *THE PRESENTATION OF SELF*, the importance of spontaneity emerges as an aspect of the performance, as the actor seeks to create a front that does not appear to be contrived. Spontaneity allows for the realization of the “true” self, an idealized type of interaction that allows the individual to realize a desired face. In *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim describes a macrosociological model of spontaneity, a “finely articulated organisation in which each social value...is appreciated at its true worth” (313). Durkheim, though primarily concerned with labor, describes a type of social interaction that, like Goffman’s model, reaffirms the existing social environment through the notion of “truth.” Each individual is bound to the contemporary social organization, while attempting to realize a sense of freedom in expressing truth.

Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony extends this relationship further, establishing an ephemeral unconscious acceptance of existing social institutions. Change in this state, for Gramsci, takes place via change in human consciousness: “Since present control is internalized in the minds and hearts of workers and peasants, a counter form of socialization, a counter form of self-identity, is required to overthrow that control (Gramsci).”

Through changes in consciousness, hegemony forms an “moving equilibrium” (Hebdige 1979, 15) through an assimilation of the doctrinal bases of the culture through “common sense” (9). In light of [Erving Goffman](#)’s work, hegemony provides the definition of “idealized” performance and the pressure to correspond to established definition. As a representation of what Marx termed “the ideas of the ruling class” (Marx 1848, 172) hegemony provides the norms, mores, and laws to which stigma, line, face, and Durkheim’s anomie can be applied. In this sense, hegemony provides a vital link between the macrostructure of social institutions and the microsociological phenomena of face-to-face interaction.



STIGMA

ERVING GOFFMAN

THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE provides penetrating insight into the nature of interpersonal interaction and the institutions to which interaction more strongly applies. Despite an unusual, anecdotal methodology, [Erving Goffman](#)'s work displays an uncommon analytical rigor in dealing with a comparatively unexplored area of social thought. Through an inquiry into the everyday life of humanity, the book provides a strong foundation for the understanding of microsociological phenomena, an understanding bolstered by an investigation of his other writings. By limiting his work to a dramaturgical study, however, Goffman eliminates the possibility of applying the activities of the mundane world to the larger social world, a problem that may be reconciled by examining concepts employed in the book through the work of macrotheorists.

Works Cited

- Durkheim, Emile. THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN SOCIETY. NY: Macmillan, 1984 (1893)
[Erving Goffman](#). THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE. Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1959
[Erving Goffman](#). STIGMA: NOTES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SPOILED IDENTITY. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963
[Erving Goffman](#). INTERACTION RITUAL. NY: Pantheon, 1967
Gottlieb, Roger. MARXISM: 1844-1990. NY: Routledge, 1992
Hebdige, Dick. SUBCULTURE: THE MEANING OF STYLE. NY: Methuen, 1979
Tucker, Robert. THE MARX-ENGELS READER, 2nd Edition. NY: W.W. Norton, 1978

1961

[Professor Erving Goffman](#)'s ASYLUMS (Garden City: Doubleday, Anchor) and ENCOUNTERS: TWO STUDIES IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF INTERACTION (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill).

1963

[Professor Erving Goffman](#)'s STIGMA: NOTES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SPOILED IDENTITY (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall) and BEHAVIOR IN PUBLIC PLACES: NOTES ON THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF GATHERINGS (NY: The Free Press).





STIGMA: NOTES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SPOILED IDENTITY¹

[Erving Goffman](#)

Three grossly different types of stigma may be mentioned.

- First there are abominations of the body — the various physical deformities.
- Next there are blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behavior.
- Finally there are the tribal stigmas of race, nation, and religion, these being stigmas that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family.²

In all these various instances of stigma, however, including those the Greeks had in mind, the same sociological features are found: an individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him, breaking the claim that his other attributes have on us. He possesses a stigma, an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated. We and those who do not depart negatively from the particular expectations at issue I shall call the **normals**.

The attitudes we normals have toward a person with a stigma, and the actions we take in regard to him, are well known, since these responses are what benevolent social action is designed to soften and ameliorate. By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class.³ We use specific stigma terms such as cripple, bastard, moron in our daily discourse as a source of metaphor and imagery, typically without giving thought to the original meaning: We tend to impute a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one,⁴ and at the same time to impute some desirable but undesired attributes, often of a supernatural cast, such as “sixth sense,” or “understanding”.⁵

For some, there may be a hesitancy about touching or steering the blind, while for others, the perceived failure to see may be generalized into a gestalt of disability, so that the individual shouts at the blind as if they were deaf or attempts to life them as if they were crippled. Those confronting the blind may have a whole range of belief that is anchored in the stereotype. For instance, they may think they are subject to unique judgment, assuming the blinded individual draws on special channels of information unavailable to others.⁶

1. Goffman, Erving. STIGMA: NOTES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SPOILED IDENTITY. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963, pages 4-7, 8-9, 121, 122-23, 126-29, 130-31
2. In recent history, especially in Britain, low class status functioned as an important tribal stigma, the sins of the parents, or at least their milieu, being visited on the child, should the child rise improperly above his initial station. The management of class stigma is of course a central theme in the English novel.
3. Riesman, David. “Some Observations Concerning Marginality,” *Phylon*, 2nd Quarter 1951: 122
4. In regard to the blind, see E. Henrich and L. Kriegel, eds., EXPERIMENTS IN SURVIVAL (NY: Association for the Aid of Crippled Children, 1961), pages 152 and 186; and H. Chevigny, MY EYES HAVE A COLD NOSE (New Haven CT: Yale UP, 1962), page 198.
5. In the words of one blind woman, “I was asked to endorse a perfume, presumably because being sightless my sense of smell was super-discriminating.” See T. Keitlen (with N. Lobsenz), FAREWELL TO FEAR (NY: Avon, 1962), page 10.
6. Gowman, A.G. THE WAR BLIND IN AMERICAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE (NY: American Foundation for the Blind, 1957), page 198



Further, we may perceive his defensive response to his situation as a direct expression of his defect, and then see both defect and response as just retribution for something he or his parents or his tribe did, and hence a justification of the way we treat him.

Now turn from the normal to the person he is normal against. It seems generally true that members of a social category may strongly support a standard of judgment that they and others agree does not directly apply to them. Thus it is that a businessman may demand womanly behavior from females or ascetic behavior from monks, and not construe himself as someone who ought to realize either of these styles of conduct. The distinction is between realizing a norm and merely supporting it. The issue of stigma does not arise here, but only where there is some expectation on all sides that those in a given category should not only support a particular norm but also realize it.

Also, it seems possible for an individual to fail to live up to what we effectively demand of him, and yet be relatively untouched by this failure; insulated by his alienation, protected by identity beliefs of his own, he feels that he is a full-fledged normal human being, and that we are the ones who are not quite human. He bears a stigma but does not seem to be impressed or repentant about doing so. This possibility is celebrated in exemplary tales about Mennonites, Gypsies, shameless scoundrels, and very orthodox Jews.

In America at present, however, separate systems of honor seem to be on the decline. The stigmatized individual tends to hold the same beliefs about identity that we do; this is a pivotal fact. His deepest feelings about what he is may be his sense of being a “normal person,” a human being like anyone else, a person, therefore, who deserves a fair chance and a fair break.⁷ (Actually, however phrased, he bases his claims not on what he thinks is due everyone, but only everyone of a selected social category into which he unquestionably fits, for example, anyone of his age, sex, profession, and so forth.) Yet he may perceive, usually quite correctly, that whatever others profess, they do not really “accept” him and are not ready to make contact with him on “equal grounds.”⁸ Further, the standards he has incorporated from the wider society equip him to be intimately alive to what others see as his failing, inevitably causing him, if only for moments, to agree that he does indeed fall short of what he really ought to be. Shame becomes a central possibility, arising from the individual’s perception of one of his own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess, and one he can readily see himself as not possessing.

The immediate presence of normals is likely to reinforce this split between self-demand and self, but in fact self-hate and self-derogation can also occur when only he and a mirror are about.

...

The central feature of the stigmatized individual’s situation in life can now be stated. It is a question of what is often, if vaguely, called “acceptance.” Those who have dealings with him fail to accord him the respect and regard which the uncontaminated aspects of his social identity have led them to anticipate extending, and have led him to anticipate receiving; he echoes this denial by finding that some of his own attributes warrant it.

...

The nature of a “good adjustment” is now apparent. It requires that the stigmatized individual cheerfully and unselfconsciously accept himself as essentially the same as normals, while at the same time he voluntarily withholds himself from those situations in which normals would find it difficult to give lip service to their similar acceptance of him.

7. The notion of “normal human being” may have its source in the medial approach to humanity or in the tendency of large-scale bureaucratic organizations, such as the nation state, to treat all members in some respects as equal. Whatever its origins, it seems to provide the basic imagery through which laymen currently conceive of themselves. Interestingly, a convention seems to have emerged in popular life-story writing where a questionable person proves his claim to normalcy by citing his acquisition of a spouse and children, and, oddly, by attesting to his spending Christmas and Thanksgiving with them.

8. A criminal’s view of this nonacceptance is presented in T. Parker and R. Allerton, *THE COURAGE OF HIS CONVICTIONS* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1962), pages 110-11.



Since the good-adjustment line is presented by those who take the standpoint of the wider society, one should ask what the following of it by the stigmatized means to normals. It means that the unfairness and pain of having to carry a stigma will never be presented to them; it means that normals will not have to admit to themselves how limited their tactfulness and tolerance is; and it means that normals can remain relatively uncontaminated by intimate contact with the stigmatized, relatively unthreatened in their identity beliefs. It is from just these meanings, in fact, that the specifications of a good adjustment derive.

...

The general formula is apparent. The stigmatized individual is asked to act so as to imply neither that his burden is heavy nor that bearing it has made him different from us; at the same time he must keep himself at that remove from us which ensures our painlessly being able to confirm this belief about him. Put differently, he is advised to reciprocate naturally with an acceptance of himself and us, an acceptance of him that we have not quite extended him in the first place. A **phantom acceptance** is thus allowed to provide the base for a **phantom normalcy**. So deeply, then, must he be caught up in the attitude to the self that is defined as normal in our society, so thoroughly must he be a part of this definition, that he can perform this self in a faultless manner to an edgy audience that is half-watching him in terms of another show. He can even be led to join with normals in suggesting to the discontented among his own that the slights they sense are imagined slights — which of course is likely at times, because at so many social boundaries the markers are designed to be so faint as to allow everyone to proceed as though fully accepted, and this means that it will be realistic to be oriented to minimal signs perhaps not meant.

The irony of these recommendations is not that the stigmatized individual is asked to be patently for others what they decline to let him be for them, but that this expropriation of his response may well be the best return he can get on his money. If in fact he desires to live as much as possible “like any other person,” and be accepted “for what he really is,” then in many cases the shrewdest position for him to take is this one which has a false bottom; for in many cases the degree to which normals accept the stigmatized individual can be maximized by his acting with full spontaneity and naturalness as if the conditional acceptance of him, which he is careful not to overreach, is full acceptance. But of course what is a good adjustment for the individual can be an even better one for society. It might be added that the embarrassment of limits is a general feature of social organization; the maintenance of phantom acceptance is what many, to some degree, are being asked to accept. Any mutual adjustment and mutual approval between two individuals can be fundamentally embarrassed if one of the partners accepts in full the offer that the other appears to make; every “positive” relationship is conducted under implied promises of consideration and aid such that the relationship would be injured were these credits actually drawn on.

...

This essay deals with the situation of the stigmatized person and his response to the spot he is in. In order to place the resulting framework in its proper conceptual context, it will be useful to consider from different angles the concept of deviation, this being a bridge which links the study of stigma to the study of the rest of the social world.

It is possible to think of rare and dramatic failings as those most suitable for the analysis here employed. However, it would seem that exotic differentness is most useful merely as a means of making one aware of identity assumptions ordinarily so fully satisfied as to escape one’s awareness. It is also possible to think that established minority groups like Negroes and Jews can provide the best objects for this kind of analysis. This would easily lead to imbalance of treatment. Sociologically, the central issue concerning these groups is their place in the social structure; the contingencies these persons encounter in face-to-face interaction is only one part of the problem, and something that cannot itself be fully understood without reference to the history, the political development, and the current policies of the group.



It is also possible to restrict the analysis to those who possess a flaw that uneases almost all their social situations, leading these unfortunates to form a major part of their self-conception reactively, in terms of their response to this plight. This report argues differently. The most fortunate of normals is likely to have his half-hidden failing, and for every little failing there is a social occasion on which it will loom large, creating a shameful gap between virtual and actual social identity. Therefore the occasionally precarious and the constantly precarious form a single continuum, their situation in life analyzable by the same framework. (Hence persons with only a minor differentness find they understand the structure of the situation in which the fully stigmatized are placed — often attributing this sympathy to the profundity of their human nature instead of to the isomorphism of human situations. The fully and visibly stigmatized, in turn, must suffer the special indignity of knowing that they wear their situation on their sleeve, that almost anyone will be able to see into the heart of their predicament.) It is implied, then, that it is not to the different that one should look for understanding our differentness, but to the ordinary. The question of social norms is certainly central, but the concern might be less for uncommon deviations from the ordinary than for ordinary deviations from the common.

It can be assumed that a necessary condition for social life is the sharing of a single set of normative expectations by all participants, the norms being sustained in part because of being incorporated. When a rule is broken restorative measures will occur; the damaging is terminated and the damage repaired, whether by control agents or by the culprit himself.

However, the norms dealt with in this paper concern identity or being, and are therefore of a special kind. Failure or success at maintaining such norms has a very direct effect on the psychological integrity of the individual. At the same time, mere desire to abide by the norm —mere good will— is not enough, for in many cases the individual has no immediate control over his level of sustaining the norm. It is a question of the individual's condition, not his will; it is a question of conformance, not compliance. Only by introducing the assumption that the individual should know and keep his place can a full equivalent in willful action be found for the individual's social condition.

Further, while some of these norms, such as sightedness and literacy, may be commonly sustained with complete adequacy by most persons in the society, there are other norms, such as those associated with physical comeliness, which take the form of ideals and constitute standards against which almost everyone falls short at some stage in his life. And every where widely attained norms are involved, their multiplicity has the effect of disqualifying many persons. For example, in an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record of sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this perspective, this constituting one sense in which one can speak of a common value system in America. Any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways is likely to view himself —during moments at least— as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior; at times he is likely to pass and at times he is likely to find himself being apologetic or aggressive concerning known-about aspects of himself he knows are probably seen as undesirable. The general identity-values of a society may be fully entrenched nowhere, and yet they can cast some kind of shadow on the encounters encountered everywhere in daily living.

...

It should be seen, then, that stigma management is a general feature of society, a process occurring wherever there are identity norms. The same features are involved whether a major differentness is at question, of the kind traditionally defined as stigmatic, or a picayune differentness, of which the shamed person is ashamed to be ashamed. One can therefore suspect that the role of the normal and the role of stigmatized are parts of the same complex, cut from the same standard cloth... One can assume that the stigmatized and the normal have the same mental make-up, and that this necessarily is the standard one in our society; he who can play one of these roles, then, has exactly the required equipment for playing out the other, and in fact in regard to one stigma or another is likely to have developed some experience in doing so.



STIGMA

ERVING GOFFMAN

1967

[Professor Erving Goffman](#)'s INTERACTION RITUAL: ESSAYS ON FACE-TO-FACE BEHAVIOR (Garden City: Doubleday, Anchor).

1968

[Erving Goffman](#) became Benjamin Franklin Professor of Anthropology and Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania.



1969

[Professor Erving Goffman](#)'s STRATEGIC INTERACTION (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P).

1971

[Professor Erving Goffman](#)'s RELATIONS IN PUBLIC: MICROSTUDIES OF THE PUBLIC ORDER (NY: Basic Books).

1974

[Professor Erving Goffman](#)'s FRAME ANALYSIS: AN ESSAY ON THE ORGANIZATION OF EXPERIENCE (Cambridge: Harvard UP; NY: Harper and Row).



STIGMA

ERVING GOFFMAN

1976

[Professor Erving Goffman](#)'s GENDER ADVERTISEMENTS: STUDIES IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION (Society for the Anthropology of Visual Communication).

1979

[Professor Erving Goffman](#)'s GENDER ADVERTISEMENTS (Cambridge: Harvard UP; NY: Harper and Row).

1981

[Professor Erving Goffman](#)'s FORMS OF TALK (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P).

1982

November 19, Friday: [Erving Goffman](#) died of cancer at the age of 60 after having been elected to become President of the American Sociological Association.

Full-time color television broadcasting began in India (there had been some color broadcasting since 1979).

In the Philippine Islands, President Ferdinand Marcos banned video games.

1983

[Erving Goffman](#)'s final papers, "The Interaction Order" and "Felicity's Condition," were published posthumously.



1997

Charles Lemert and Ann Branaman edited THE GOFFMAN READER.

THE GOFFMAN READER

ERVING GOFFMAN



1999

When a Call for Submissions on the subject of using “disability as a category of historical analysis” was issued by Lauri Umansky of the History Department of Suffolk University, I decided to use the occasion to go public about my awareness that while discrimination against the disabled is actually a mere subset of the broader category of discrimination against all those whose bodies exhibit deformities whether disabled by these deformities or not, the social plight of those who are merely deformed without being in any way disabled has been totally ignored. –That we who are merely deformed are, in the important sense that no account need be taken of our social plight, “invisible.”

ASSLEY

- > I am soliciting material for an anthology on the history of
- > physical disability in the United States, to be published by
- > New York University Press in the year 2000. I welcome essays
- > that view disability as a social construct, that attempt to use
- > disability as a category of historical analysis, and that
- > employ any of a wide range of approaches—including social,
- > cultural, legal, institutional, oral, or intellectual history.
- > Work that bridges these approaches, and that attends to issues
- > of gender, race, class, and age, would be ideal. I am also
- > particularly interested in studies that focus on the agency,
- > perspectives, and communities of disabled people. (Medical
- > aspects of disability, if viewed through these lenses, could be
- > appropriate.)
- >
- > Please contact me immediately if you are interested.
- > The deadline for papers is May 31, 1999.
- >
- > Please reply privately to:
- >
- > Lauri Umansky, History Dept., Suffolk University at:
- > LUmans85113@aol.com
- >
- > or send submissions and queries to:
- >
- > Lauri Umansky <LUmans85113@aol.com>
- > History Department
- > Suffolk University
- > 8 Ashburton Place
- > Boston, MA 02108-2770
- > (phone: 617-573-8120)



Please pardon a personal inquiry, as the matter is of some importance in my life. I suffered a bout with bovine tuberculosis at age 6 or 7 which left me for many years with a twisted spine. My tailbone stuck out behind me like a miniature unremovable erection. Over the years, in order to function, I developed enormous muscular buttocks and an exceedingly thick torso: I was using muscles to provide support for my upper body, which in a person of normal bone development would have been provided by the spinal column.

My life was one long episode of discrimination, oppression, and persecution, from that point up until, at about age 42, while one day I was out chopping wood, some adhesion between two vertebrae in my lower back popped and I fell to the ground. Over a period of years I developed an entirely new posture, as my lordosis twist eased, and people developed an entirely different reaction to me as a person. I transited from being a person whom no-one could stand, into a person who (I can now report) is quite well regarded by those who know me.

I am writing to you because I found that, during the period of my lordosis deformity, because my deformity in fact **disabled** me in no way, I was able to make no use of any US laws in regard to discrimination against the disabled. There was no question that I was being discriminated against, demonstrably forced either to accept the lowest forms of employment or to perform the most highly skilled work (as for instance a computer systems analyst) for pay no better than that awarded a secretary or a mail boy.

I was simply told that was my lot in life, and in fact one long-term employer (GE Nuclear Energy Division) explained in a kindly manner that unfortunately I was totally nonpromotable simply because “no one could respect you” — a remark addressed directly to my bodily deformity.

The discrimination which I experienced was distinctly based upon the fact that I was a man who did not look like a man, a man who exhibited womanly characteristics, to wit, huge obvious buttocks. Thus one might suppose that I might have been able to find protection under the statutes against sexual harassment! However, the situation in that respect was identical with the situation in respect to disability. (I was not disabled, merely disfigured, and therefore there was no claim to be made that I was being discriminated against on the basis of a disability. Likewise, I was not a woman, merely a man who was being reacted to as if he were a woman, and therefore there was no claim to be made that I was being discriminated against on the basis of my gender.)

For a long time I have thought of writing about my personal experience, perhaps along the lines of an amplification of [Erving Goffman](#)'s work on stigma and the management of spoiled identity.

What I am wondering is whether your planned publication might be a venue for that writing. I do recognize that this would require expansion of the topic of disability, to include not only those who are **unable** because of a physical defect to perform specific tasks but also those who are **not allowed by our society** to perform in any high-status roles because their repulsive physical defect is found incongruous with high status in society.

===



STIGMA

ERVING GOFFMAN

Dear Austin,

Thank you for writing in response to my call for papers. Your story is worth telling, and you write beautifully. I don't think this volume will be the best venue for it, however. I'm keeping the book very much within the discipline of history — really that is what defines the project and distinguishes this collection from the many other recent books in disability studies. The kind of analysis you propose seems like it would fit better in an interdisciplinary journal/collection. Actually, I think you've got a book to write and I hope you write it! Best of luck.

Yours,

Lauri Umansky

2011

Translation of [Thoreau](#) materials into Portuguese in Brazil: *CAMINHADA*. Tradução de Davi Araújo. Içara: Dracaena. 56 pages. Also, *VIDA SEM PRINCÍPIO*. Tradução de José Luiz Perota. Içara: Dracaena. 48 pages.

[TIMELINE OF WALDEN](#)

Arjen de Leeuw's and Walter van Broekhuizen's short movie "Une Condition Naturelle" about life in the woods, in a 3-sided set constructed of cardboard to more or less resemble [Henry Thoreau](#)'s shanty in the Walden Woods.

UNE CONDITION NATURELLE
THOREAU AND GOFFMAN



COPYRIGHT NOTICE: In addition to the property of others, such as extensive quotations and reproductions of images, this "read-only" computer file contains a great deal of special work product of Austin Meredith, copyright ©2013. Access to these interim materials will eventually be offered for a fee in order to recoup some of the costs of preparation. My hypercontext button invention which, instead of creating a hypertext leap through hyperspace –resulting in navigation problems– allows for an utter alteration of the context within which one is experiencing a specific content already being viewed, is claimed as proprietary to Austin Meredith – and therefore freely available for use by all. Limited permission to copy such files, or any material from such files, must be obtained in advance in writing from the "Stack of the Artist of Kouroo" Project, 833 Berkeley St., Durham NC 27705. Please contact the project at <Kouroo@kouroo.info>.

"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: August 23, 2013

ARRGH AUTOMATED RESearch REPORT
GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, upon someone's request we have pulled it out of the hat of a pirate that has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (depicted above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of data modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture. This is data mining. To respond to such a request for information, we merely push a button.



STIGMA

ERVING GOFFMAN

Commonly, the first output of the program has obvious deficiencies and so we need to go back into the data modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and do a recompile of the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process which you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place your requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>.
Arrgh.