



Charles Horton Cooley

Cooley and Mead had an academic love hate relationship going on in their work. On the one hand, they complemented each other. The other, found them at odds. Cooley is often credited with the development of symbolic-interaction (SI). As a theoretical perspective, SI dominated the decades of the seventies and eighties. I would say that SI is still a strong force in sociological theory. The last few decades have seen a resurgence of conflict theory with a very recent rise of a type of neo-functionalism.



The Looking Glass Self

Cooley's Looking Glass Self

The concept of the "looking glass self" is undoubtedly the most famous aspect of Cooley's work, and became known and accepted by most psychologists and sociologists. It expanded William James's idea of self to include the capacity of reflection on its own behavior. Other people's views build, change, and maintain self-image; thus, there is an interaction between how people see themselves and how others see them.

Cooley's term "looking glass self" means that people see themselves as others see them, as if reflected in a mirror. According to this concept, in order to develop and shape behavior, interactions with others must exist. People gain their identity and form their habits by looking at themselves through the perception of society and other people they interact with. This concept of self, created by others, is

unique to human beings. It begins at an early age and continues throughout the entirety of a person's lifespan. A person will never stop modifying their "self" unless they become removed from society and cease social interactions. According to Cooley, in his work *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902), the "looking glass self" involves three steps:

- 1 To begin, people picture their appearance of themselves, traits and personalities.
- 2 They then use the reactions of others to interpret how others visualize them.
- 3 Finally, they develop their own self-concept, based on their interpretations. Their self-concept can be enhanced or diminished by their conclusions.

Cooley developed this concept in 1902, after extensive sociological testing of children in a controlled environment. Children were told to enter a room containing a bowl of candy and take only one piece. The children were then let into the room and monitored by video camera. The children, unaware of being watched, took as much candy as they could. The experiment was then repeated, but this time the room the children entered was lined with mirrors so the children could see themselves. In almost all cases the children took only one piece of candy. In Cooley's interpretation, the children, by observing their own behavior in mirrors, modified themselves out of guilt. Cooley believed that the images the children saw in the mirrors represented how they believed society saw them. Because they saw that others would see them as gluttons in the mirror, the children felt like gluttons and altered their behavior.

In his attempt to illustrate the reflected character of the self, Cooley compared it to a mirror, or looking glass in which people study their reflection:

As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be, so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it (Cooley 1902).

SOURCE: http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Charles_Horton_Cooley#Looking_Glass_Self



W. I. Thomas (The Thomas Theorem)

Thomas Theorem

In *The Unadjusted Girl* (1923) Thomas developed the concept of the "definition of the situation":

Preliminary to any self-determined act of behavior there is always a stage of examination and deliberation which we may call the definition of the situation. ... [This is always subject to] a rivalry between the spontaneous definition of the situation made by members of an organized society and the definition which his society has provided for him. The individual tends to a hedonistic selection of activity – pleasure first; and society to a utilitarian selection – safety first (Thomas 1923).

In another words, people do not respond always to a situation based on objective features of the situation, but also based on the subjective meaning that situation has for them. Once they assign certain meaning to the situation, all their following behaviors are shaped by that meaning.

A 1928 book on *The Child in America*, co-authored with his research assistant Dorothy Swaine (later his wife), contains the sentence which—although some consider it a truism—would go on to become famous as the Thomas theorem: If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences (Thomas and Thomas 1928, 572).

Source: http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/W._I._Thomas



Erving Goffman -- An Introduction

Erving Goffman

by **B. Diane Blackwood** Article "made for hire"
for Magill's Guide to 20th Century Authors (1997) Salem
Press, Pasadena, CA.

Dr. Erving Goffman received his bachelor's degree from the University of Toronto in his native Canada in 1945. His master's and doctorate were granted by the University of Chicago in 1949 and 1953, respectively, where he studied both sociology and social anthropology. While working on his doctorate, he spent a year on one of the smaller of the Shetland islands gathering material for his dissertation and his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959; which is available in at least ten different languages and has been almost continuously in print. In 1958, Dr. Goffman joined the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley and was promoted to full professor in 1962. He joined the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania in 1968 where he became the Benjamin Franklin Professor of Anthropology and Sociology. In 1977 he was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship. Just prior to his death, Goffman served as president of the American Sociological Association in 1981-1982.

In the 70's, he served on the Committee for the Study of Incarceration based on his work *Asylums*:

Essays in the Social Situations of Mental Patients and Other Inmates and prior to that he also served as a "visiting scientist" to the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda MD, where he began his researches that led to this book. Asylums is a penetrating analysis of the significance of social structure in producing conforming behavior, especially in environments that Goffman labeled "total institutions," such as mental asylums, prisons and military establishments.

Erving Goffman's primary methodology was ethnographic study, observation and participation rather than statistical data gathering, and his theories provided an ironic insight into routine social actions. For example, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* uses the theatrical stage as a metaphor to explain how we "stage manage" the images we try to convey to those around us. For this impression management, Goffman coined the term "dramaturgy."

The book cover to his *Relations in Public* describes him as "perhaps the most precise and perceptive 'people watcher' writing today." *Relations in Public* is a continuation of the researches presented in three of his prior books, *Encounters*, *Behaviour in Public Places*, and *Interaction Ritual*. Tom Burns says of Goffman's work, "The eleven books form a singularly compact body of writing. All his published work was devoted to topics and themes which were closely connected, and the methodology, angles of approach, and, of course, style of writing remained characteristically his own throughout." *Interaction Ritual* in particular is an interesting account of daily social interaction viewed with a

new perspective accounting for the logic of our behavior in such ordinary circumstances as entering a crowded elevator or bus.

Although sometimes controversial in his conclusions in *Gender Advertisements*, an examination of the arrangement and use of male and female images in modern advertising, Goffman contributes to our understanding of the way images are used to convey social information and how those images have been incorporated into our social expectations. As Goffman wrote, gender advertisements are "both shadow and substance: they show not only what we wish or pretend to be, but what we are." *Gender Advertisements* and *Stigma* both examine the ways we tend to classify others and be classified by them and how we tend to interact based upon those classification. Goffman used the word "normalization" for this process of classification. Tom Burns describes *Frame Analysis* as "Goffman's longest and most ambitious book. It is about how we shape and compartmentalise our experience of life and of the world of objects and events around us, and about how the experiencing and acting self, too, can be compartmentalised into a series of part-selves, each a potential factor in the production of experience for ourselves and for others." Again, the metaphor of theatre and stage management is used to explain how this compartmentalisation is accomplished and why it is necessary. His last book, *Forms of Talk*, was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle award and was reviewed in both the *New York Review of Books* and the *London Review of Books*. It continues his original metaphor of theatre by examining the

social rituals and conventions observed in conversation in the light of performances.

ERVING GOFFMAN Born: Manville, Alberta, Canada; June 11, 1922

Died: Philadelphia Pennsylvania; November 19, 1982

Principal Works

nonfiction books: The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, 1959; Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates, 1961; Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction, 1961; Behaviour in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings, 1963; Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity, 1963; Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour, 1967; Strategic Interaction, 1969; Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order, 1971; Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience, 1974; Gender Advertisements, 1979; Forms of Talk, 1981.

nonfiction essays: [Essays incorporated into books are not listed] 'Symbols of Class Status', 1951; 'On Cooling the Mark Out: Some Aspects of Adaptation to Failure', 1952; 'The Service Station Dealer: The Man and His Work', 1953; 'Interpersonal Persuasion', 1956; 'Alienation from Interaction', 1957; 'Characteristics of Total Institutions' 1957; 'On Some Convergences of Sociology and Psychiatry: A Sociologist's View', 1957; 'The Moral Career of the Mental Patient', 1959; 'The Neglected Situation', 1964; 'The Staff World', 1968; 'The Arrangement Between the Sexes', 1977.

Bibliographical references:

Jason Ditton, *The View From Goffman*, 1980, edits a group of critical essays on Goffman's contributions to sociology and includes a bibliography of Goffman's work through that year. Paul Drew and Anthony Wootton, editors of *Erving Goffman: Exploring the Interaction Order*, 1988, have collected essays exploring Goffman's "contribution to the study of forms of human association." *Erving Goffman*, 1992, by Tom Burns, is not a biography of Goffman's life, but a sociological examination of his work. This book also contains a bibliographic listing of Goffman's books. Randall Collins edits and introduces essays in *Four Sociological Traditions: Selected Reading*, 1994, which reprints parts of two of Erving Goffman's essays, 'The Nature of Deference and Demeanor', (1956), and 'Frame Analysis' while explaining that Goffman moved from the tradition of anthropological type sociological study to the micro-sociological perspective of the interactionist tradition. All adequately comprehensive introductory sociological texts mention Goffman's work, placing him in the symbolic interactionist paradigm of sociological thought; see for example James M. Henslin's *Introducing Sociology*, 1975; or David B. Brinkerhoff and Lynn K. White, *Sociology*, 1991. *Contemporary Authors*, Vol. 9, 1995, 210-211, contains a short biographical sketch and a listing of magazine articles of critical review of Goffman's work and Vol. 108, 1995, 182, contains an obituary. Obituaries appear in the *New York Times*, November 22, 1982 and *Time*, December 6, 1982.



Dramaturgical Terms

Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach

Term

Definition

Dramaturgy

using the concept of the theater metaphor to analyze how people interact in our everyday performance.

Persona

a mask worn to project a particular image to an audience.

Performance

the activity "given off" by an actor for their audience

Stage

the makeup of the situation; the location where a performance unfolds

Setting

the physical layout or background where interaction occurs, includes the "props"

Scene

the action taking place within a specific setting (just like for a drama or play)

Actor/Character/Performer

a person in a given role, performing the duties that are consistent with that role

Audience

the people for whom we perform our roles-- note: the audience members are also actors to each other

Scripts

our internalized categories and "labels" that we project when interacting; can be very explicit, like when people who have certain jobs are expected to literally say specific lines... or like when you are in a relationship and one person says "i love you," you're expected to reply, "i love you, too."

Backstage

the "behind the scenes" (ex. in a restaurant, the kitchen is the "backstage")

Impression Management

how a person manages their peers impressions of how we act in interactions

Dramatic Realization

an attempt to make ones better qualities noticed when they might otherwise go unnoticed (ex. on a date, making sure to point out and talk about your achievements at school, sports, work, etc. to make a good impression.)

Idealization

portraying yourself to others in order to closely resemble the values of society (emphasizing your positive qualities to make yourself look better)

Ideal Type

presentation of oneself in an optimal manner

Identity Negotiation

the process by which roles are established; makes interaction possible

Mystification

the air of superiority that occurs when you conceal parts of yourself to create distance

Accounts

an explanation for ones actions or behaviors (aka excuses)

Tact

how you or others act to avoid embarrass or to attempt repair of a situation