

Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

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Overheads Class 27: The Dramaturgical Approach

The Dramaturgical Approach

* Today we will explore the dramaturgical approach to emotion by examining the works of Erving Goffman and Louis Zurcher

(1) Erving Goffman: The Presentation of Self:

* Originator of *dramaturgical sociology*

* Central premise: *when human beings interact, each desires to manage the impressions the others receive of him/her.*

* Uses metaphor of the theatrical performance: *in effect, each puts on a "show" for the others.*

* Interactants, either by themselves, or in "teams":

- give "*performances*"
- enact "*parts*" or "*routines*"
- make use of a "*setting*" and "*props*"
- move back and forth between the "*front region*" of the "*scene*" and the "*back stage*" (hidden from the audience).

* The outcome of each performance is an *imputation* by the audience of a particular kind of *self* to the performed character(s).

* This *imputation* of self is *as much* or *more* a product of the expressive, ritualistic, or ceremonial elements in the actor's behavior as of the substantive, practical, or instrumental elements.

* As he points out "*information about the individual helps to define the situation. Therefore, it is to the individual's advantage to present him/herself in ways that will best serve his/her ends.*

* Control is achieved largely by portraying oneself in a manner that influences the *definition of the situation*, thus leading others to act *voluntarily* in accordance with one's own plan.

* The self thus becomes an *object* about which the *actor* wishes to *foster an impression*.

* Additional aspects of this general theme:

1. Human beings strive to interact with others in ways that maintain both their own "face" and that of other interactants;

2. Deference represents the conveyance of regard and respect, and demeanour provides the means through which the actor creates an image of him/herself for others;

3. The social function of embarrassment resides in the demonstration that the face-losing actor is at least disturbed by it and may prove more worthy another time;

4. Misinvolvements (i.e. ways in which an actor may lose his/her involvement in a conversational encounter) violate the social requirement that interactants must elicit and sustain spontaneous involvement in a shared focus of attention;

5. Symptoms of mental illness may well be seen as a failure to conform to the tacit rules of decorum and demeanor that regulate interpersonal "occasions";

6. Actors, like gamblers, knowingly take avoidable risks, which represent special opportunities to establish and maintain face;

7. "Role distance" is the discrepancy between the actor's role prescriptions

and role performance.

* Goffman's work and symbolic interactionism share:

- a methodological preference for sympathetic introspection
- a view that norms, positions, and roles are simply the *frameworks* within which human interaction occurs
- a recognition that many significant norms tend to escape notice, and thus a focus on their violation

* Contributes:

- a newfound focus on impression management
- additional emphasis on human capacity for self-reflectivity

* Criticisms:

- Not an explicit theory: a plausible, loose, frame of reference
- Little evidence: but illuminating illustrations
- Few empirically testable propositions
- Overgeneralization
- Less need for “performances” in increasingly informal society
- Narrow focus on face to face interaction/ ignoring rest
- Ignoring interactional tasks in favor of narrow focus on expressions/ impression management
- Ignores structural power relations in favor of symptomatic “office politics”
- Exhibits a sordid, disenchanting view of humans and their society

* Ultimately, Goffman makes a major contribution, but is considered too narrowly focused, and as presenting a sordid picture of humanity.

Louis Zurcher: The Staging of Emotion

* While influenced by Goffman, Zurcher focuses not so much on the

“presentation of self” as he does on how emotional “performances” are “scripted” in interactions.

* The performance of emotion is enacted by the individual in terms of his or her understanding of appropriate emotional behaviors in a particular situation

* The situation often calls for a series of versatile emotional presentations, sometimes in a programmed order.

* A specific social situation, depending on how people perceive their place in it, can evoke a remarkable variety of emotional performances.”

* Today we will review Zurcher’s analyses of:

- (1) a college football game; and
- (2) a military reserve exercise.

(i) Staging of Emotion at a Football Game

* At a college football game, Zurcher comments on:

- the structure of the staging for emotional display
- the phasing of people into sets of contextually appropriate performances
- the evolution of phasing from expectation for emotional experience, to diffuse emotional readiness, to specific emotional displays.
- direction by cue-producing others and events which evoke rapidly shifting emotional expressions

* Zurcher’s analysis is divided temporally into observations on the staging of emotion (i) before the game; (ii) during the game; (iii) halftime; (iv) the end of the game; and (v) after the game.

* This involved settings such as the field, the locker room, etc.

- * A wide variety of emotions were enacted in response to situational cues.
- * Zurcher feels that any adequate theory of human emotion should attend thus to the situation which shapes emotional experience and expression (e.g. specially-structured events).
- * The orchestration of emotions in staged events follows a scripted phasing:
 - (1) The arousal of expectations for an emotional experience
 - (2) Generating a diffuse emotional state
 - (3) Directed into a series of discrete, identifiable emotional displays.
- * The dramaturgical nature of sets of emotions in such events is typified by:
 - remarkable shifts in emotional display within a short time frame
 - influenced by cue-producing others and events
 - conducted in settings constructed for emotional performances
- * This emphasis doesn't imply that:
 - people always are totally manipulated in such performances
 - that the personal experience of emotion is always a shallow facade (e.g. existence of differences in emotional experiences and displays)
- * Yet, many individual influences may be operating in a staged emotional setting
- * The interactions among scripted setting, emotional display, and emotional display need to be more thoroughly investigated and better understood.

(ii) The War Game: Analysis of a Military Reserve Exercise

- * Zurcher extends dramaturgical analysis to his participation in a three-day U.S. military reserve exercise.

* He attempts to illustrate:

- the organizations' scripting of emotion upon its members
- the facility of dramaturgical analysis to incorporate micro and macro organizational factors into the study of emotion

* Zurcher's analysis describes reservists' activities and emotional behaviors in response to cues, props, scripts and settings.

* He divides these temporally into:

- (1) preparing for the war game (rehearsing the organizational script);
- (2) traveling to the war game (engaging the organizational script);
- (3) performing in the field (enacting, modifying, or negating the organizational script); and
- (4) leaving the war game (disengaging the organizational script).

* Organizations like the military can powerfully and effectively script emotions for their members, routinely affecting them beyond the immediate organizational setting.

* Their emotional scripts can contain elements of flexibility that accommodate member deviances while still maintaining affective control.

* There are no completely compelling organizational scripts for member emotional expression. Why?

- gaps or inconsistencies in organizational scripts are commonplace
- the script can't anticipate all situations
- members perceive/interpret the script differently

* This results in the following alternatives for emotional expression:

- (1) rehearsing the organizational script;
- (2) engaging and enacting it;
- (3) modifying it (including the creation of ad hoc scripts);

- (4) negating the organizational script; and
- (5) disengaging from the script.

* We also must bear in mind that:

- organizations are not entirely scripting entities
- are made up of groups of people interacting and negotiating in a boundaried setting

* Future research should look at:

- how these emotional scripts emerge
- how they become organizational norms
- how and why members are affected by or affect the norms.

* Zurcher concludes by arguing that dramaturgical analysis on emotion can readily incorporate:

- (1) Micro phenomena;
- (2) Macro phenomena
- (3) Situational phenomena

* Zurcher agrees with Maines call for “mesostructural” analyses (e.g. Strauss’ “negotiated order”). Such arguments inform the dramaturgical analyses of emotional expression (e.g. situational phenomena).

* A useful dramaturgical/mesostructural frame for studying emotional expression in future research would include:

- (1) macro organizational scripting/scenario for actors’ emotional expression;
- (2) the meso immediate situation; and
- (3) the micro interactions between the actors

- all of which interact with actors’ formulations for emotional expression.

* Such an “emotional context” acts as a caution against any assumption of dramaturgical homogeneity.

* Perhaps a better metaphor than the stage would be a “three ring circus” where micro, macro, and meso realities occur simultaneously.

* These must be analytically integrated if sense is ever to be made of actor emotional expression in organizational settings.