Mismanaging and Correcting Impressions

Oct. 4, 2006

http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134
“Hooking up” study

• You are eligible for this study if you engaged in sexual activity with someone with whom you had no romantic or emotional attachment.
• For the purposes of this study sexual activity includes any heavy petting (fondling of breasts or genitals) and any vaginal, oral and/or anal sex.
• The activity must have occurred no more than three times with the same person.
• You will be interviewed for 60-90 minutes
• Participation is anonymous
• Participants will interview a researcher and write a brief paper (see web site for assignment) to receive course project credit
• Contact Dr. Teresa Tsushima (ttsushim@iastate.edu)
Mismanaging impressions

- Mismanaged impressions may result in spoiled individual identities, spoiled situations, and ruined team identities.
- When people believe they are failing to give off the desired impression, they attempt to repair the bad impression.
- Aligning action: action taken to restore an identity that has been damaged (p. 199)
  - Account: statement designed to explain unanticipated, embarrassing, or unacceptable behavior after the behavior has occurred (p. 199)
  - Disclaimer: assertion designed to forestall any complaints or negative reactions to a behavior or statement that is about to occur (p. 199)
  - Protective practices: aligning action taken to help another person restore or maintain a desired identity, e.g., civil inattention, tact, accepting apology.
Aces and bombers

✔ Daniel Albas & Cheryl Albas
✔ Study of college student impression management after receiving examination grades
✔ Research methods: student logs, interviews, observation
✔ Students attempt to manage impressions so others see them in positive light

Aces and bombers

- ✔ Aces attempt to reveal good grades but remain modest
  - ✔ Accidental revelation
  - ✔ Passive persuasion, active persuasion
  - ✔ Ask someone else, foot-in-the-door approach

- ✔ Bombers attempt to conceal poor grades
  - ✔ Leaving class
  - ✔ Lying about grade
  - ✔ Emphatic concealment, subtle concealment
  - ✔ Nonchalance
Aces and bombers

✓ Aces and bombers help bombers save face
  ✓ Ace-ace: open, bragging allowed
  ✓ Ace-bomber: marked by aligning actions
  ✓ Bomber-bomber: pity party
David Luckenbill’s (1977) study of criminal homicide

Method: examination of police records in 70 homicides

Argument: homicides typically result from two individuals attempting to control undesired impressions (“save face”)

People kill to defend desired social statuses

Six steps in homicide interaction

Step 1: Offense to “face”

✅ Offense to face
  • Insult to offender, family or friends (41%)
  • Refusal to comply with request (34%)
  • Non-verbal or physical gesture (25%)

The offender, victim, and two friends were driving toward the country where they could consume their wine. En route, the victim turned to the offender, both of whom were located in the back seat, and stated: “You know, you really got some good parents. You know, you’re really a son-of-a-bitch. You’re a leech. The whole time you were out of a job, you were living with them, and weren’t even paying. The car you have should be your father’s. He’s the one who made the payments. Any time your dad goes to the store, you’re the first in line to sponge off him. Why don’t you grow up and stop being a leech?”

Step 2: Interpretation of offense

Interpretation of victim’s action as personally offensive

- Audience or victim may be questioned about meaning (60%)
- Offender may determine meaning from “rehearsals” (40%)

The offender and his friend were sitting in a booth at a tavern drinking beer. The offender’s friend told him that the offender’s girlfriend was “playing” with another man (victim) at the other end of the bar. The offender looked at them and asked his friend if he thought something was going on. The friend responded, “I wouldn’t let that guy fool around with [her] if she was mine.” The offender agreed, and suggested to his friend that his girlfriend and the victim be shot for their actions. His friend said that only the victim should be shot, not the girlfriend.
Step 3: Countermove to “save face”

✔ Countermove to “save face” (offender doesn’t back down)
  • Offender kills victim (14%)
  • Offender issues challenge to victim (86%)

The offender, victim, and two neighbors were sitting in the living room drinking wine. The victim started calling the offender, his wife, abusive names. The offender told him to “shut up.” Nevertheless, he continued. Finally, she shouted, ‘1 said shut up. If you don’t shut up and stop it, I’m going to kill you and I mean it.”

Step 4: Forging agreement to battle

✓ Forging agreement to battle (victim won’t back down)
  • Victim doesn’t comply with challenge (41%)
  • Physical attack (30%)
  • Counterchallenge (29%)
  • Audience often helps define situation as battle

The victim continued ridiculing the offender before friends. The offender finally shouted, “I said shut up. If you don’t shut up and stop it, I’m going to kill you and I mean it.” The victim continued his abusive line of conduct. The offender proceeded to the kitchen, secured a knife, and returned to the living room. She repeated her warning. The victim rose from his chair, swore at the offender’s stupidity, and continued laughing at her. She thrust the knife deep into his chest.

Steps 5 & 6

✔ Step 5: The battle
  • Having a weapon helps

✔ Step 6: Aftermath
  • Audience helps determine offender action (flee or remain on scene)

✔ Katz’s (1988) analysis of homicide during stick-up found that stick-ups may become fatal as offender, in face of opposition, defends definition of situation as stick-up and his identity as a “hard man”