The Social Construction of Beauty/
Dramaturgical Perspective

Feb. 18, 2005

http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134
Extra credit projects

✔ Volunteer project
  • Feb. 23: Completion of volunteer form
  • April 15: 16 hours and short (3+ pages) paper

✔ Photo essay project
  • Feb. 23: One-page summary (must indicate key concept)
  • April 15: 10-20 photo essay with intro and captions

✔ Research paper project
  • Feb. 23: One-page outline with two sources
  • April 15: Paper (5+ pages) with four sources
Beauty is stratified

✓ Women and men have different beauty standards
  • Attractiveness is prerequisite for femininity, not masculinity
  • Female beauty standard requires more time and money to achieve

✓ U.S. beauty standard idealizes Caucasian features and devalues those of other races
  • However, black women have more satisfaction with their bodies than white women

✓ Wealthy can better afford to be beautiful

Source: Saltzberg & Chrisler’s (1995) chapter in Freeman’s Women.
Personal consequences of beauty standards

- Bad first impressions for non-beautiful
- Discrimination in many institutions
- Economic costs
- Time costs
- Medical side effects of achieving beauty
- Dissatisfaction with bodies
- Appearance may play a large role in age discrimination
Everyday interactions as cause of society
Impression management

Impression management: act of presenting a favorable public image of oneself so that others will form positive judgments (p. 138)

- Impression management differs from role to role
- Impression management of my self (who I am), the situation (what is going on) and my team or organization are connected
- When people believe they are failing to give off correct impressions, they attempt to correct the bad impression

Concept developed by Erving Goffman (1922-82)

Goffman used concept of drama as metaphor for social life
Dramaturgical perspective

✓ Dramaturgy: study of social interaction as theater, in which people ("actors") project images ("play roles") in front of others ("audience") (p. 144)

✓ Some elements of performance

- Front stage: area of social interaction where people perform and work to maintain appropriate impressions (p. 144)
- Back stage: area of social interaction away from the view of an audience, where people can rehearse and rehash their behavior (p. 144)
- Props and costumes
- Verbal expression
- Nonverbal expression
- Performance team: set of individuals who cooperate in staging a performance that leads an audience to form an impression of one or all team members (p. 150)