



Managing and Mismanaging Impressions

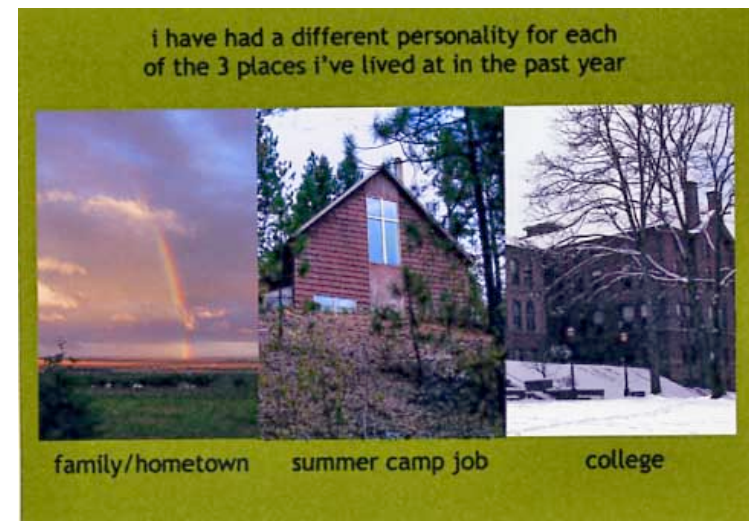
Feb. 25, 2008

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~soc.134>



Impression management

- ✓ Impression management: act of presenting a favorable public image of oneself so that others will form positive judgments (p. 176)
 - 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. 189)
- ✓ Some elements of performance
 - Front stage: area of social interaction where people perform and work to maintain appropriate impressions (p. 189)
 - Back stage: area of social interaction away from the view of an audience, where people can rehearse and rehash their behavior (p. 189)
 - Props and costumes should be consistent with performance
 - Verbal expression (impressions given) and nonverbal expression (impressions given off) should be consistent with each other
 - 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. 195)

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)
- ✓ Aligning actions assert the relationship between our problematic conduct and cultural norms
- ✓ Protective practices: actions taken to help another person restore or maintain a desired identity, e.g., civil inattention, tact, accepting apology
- ✓ Cooling out (the mark): gently persuading someone who has lost face to accept a less desirable but still reasonable alternative identity (p. 200)

Homicide to save face

- ✓ 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, ‘I 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"