

# Lecture 7

## Self Presentation



each to each  
a looking-glass  
reflects the other  
that doth pass...  
(Cooley)

# Part I: Outline

What is Self-Presentation?

Goals of Self-Presentation

Appearing Likable

Appearing Competent

Conveying High Status and Power

# What Is Self-presentation?

*Self-presentation* –

the process through which we try to control the impressions people form of us

Self-presentation is synonymous with impression management.

Considering only your physical appearance, do you look:

Socially dominant

Kind and understanding

Aggressive

Intelligent

Conscientious

1= not at all

9 = very much

# To What Extent Do You Make a Conscious Effort to Present Yourself in Terms Of:

Clothing

Physical body

Way you carry yourself

Hair

Car

1= not at all

9 = very much

# To What Extent Do You Make a Conscious Effort to Present Yourself in Terms Of:

Apartment/house/your room

Friends

Organizations/clubs

Other?

1 = not at all

9 = very much

# Why Do People Self-present?

To acquire desirable resources

To help “construct” our self-images

To enable our social encounters to run  
more smoothly

# When Do People Self-present?

When we think others are paying attention to us

When others can influence whether or not we reach our goals

When those goals are important to us

When we think observers have impressions of us that are different from the ones we desire



# The Spotlight Effect:

Gilovich and colleagues asked Cornell students to sit in room with five other subjects while wearing a Barry Manilow t-shirt.



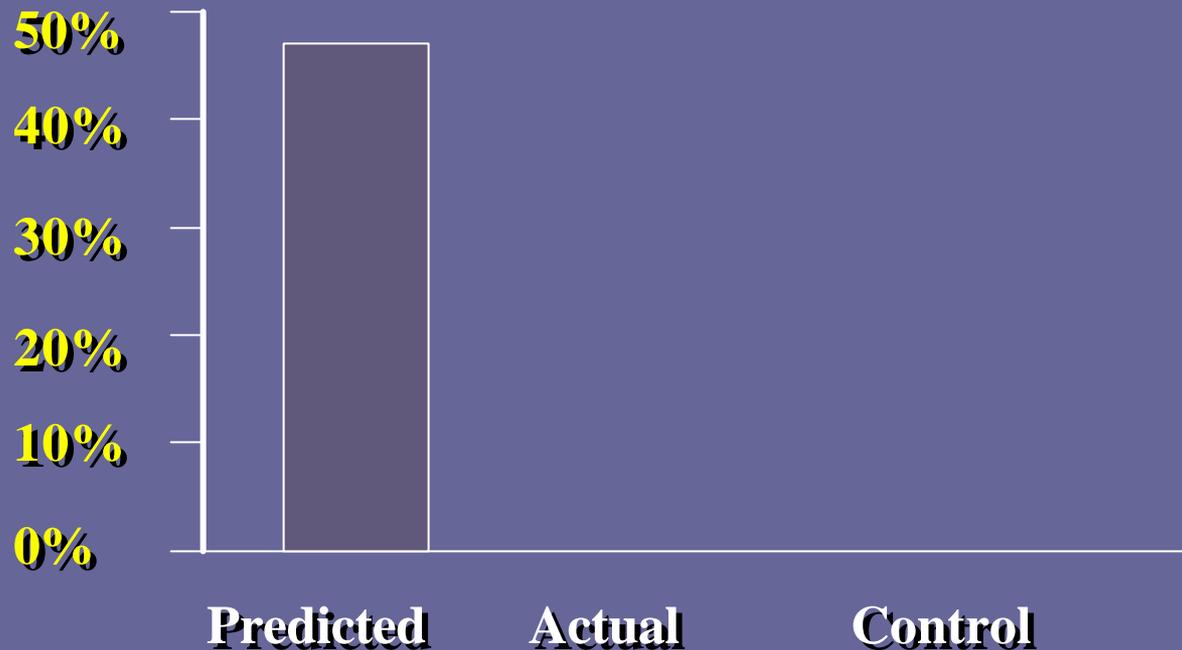


# The Spotlight Effect:

The student who wore the shirt then predicted how many of the other students in the room could recall and identify who was on the shirt.



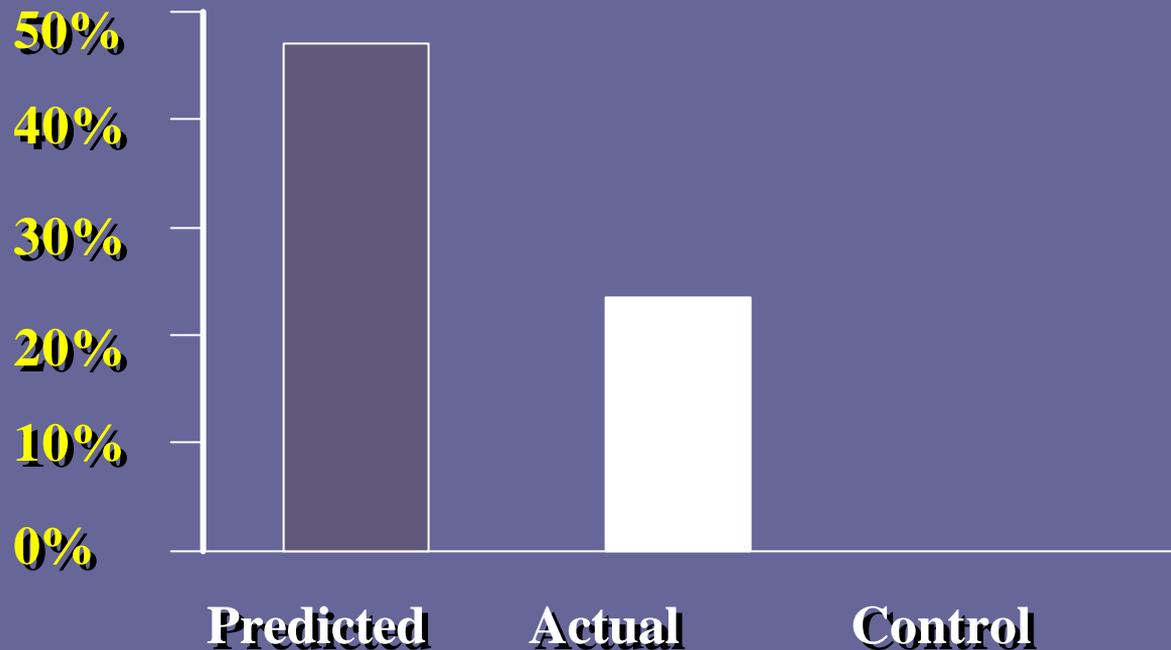
# The Spotlight Effect:



The students who wore the t-shirt predicted that nearly half of the others would know who was on the shirt.



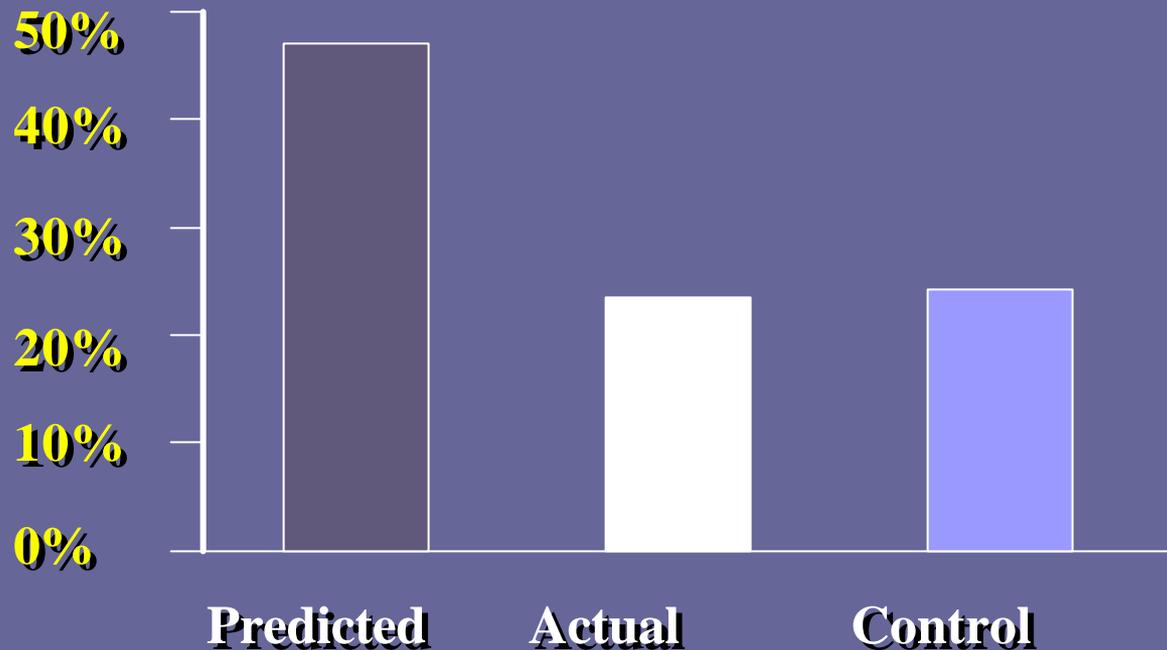
# The Spotlight Effect:



In reality, less than a quarter of the other subjects recalled who was on the shirt.



# The Spotlight Effect:



Control students who watched the subjects on video closely predicted how many students would identify the shirt.

# When Do People Self-present?

*Public self-consciousness* –  
the tendency to have a chronic  
awareness of oneself as being in the  
public eye

# When Do People Self-present?

*Self monitoring* –

the tendency to be chronically concerned with one's public image and to adjust one's actions to fit the needs of the current situation

# Self-monitoring

High self-monitors:

- Are inconsistent across situations

- Are good at assessing what others want and tailoring their behavior to fit those demands

Low self-monitors:

- Look inside themselves to decide how to act

- Don't change as much across situations

# The Nature of Self-presentation

Self-presentation is sometimes deceptive, but usually not.

More often, our self-presentations focus on emphasizing our strengths and minimizing our weaknesses.

Because trust is necessary in social relationships, people go to great lengths to detect liars.

# Goals of Self-presentation

To be seen as likeable (ingratiation)

To be seen as competent (self-promotion)

To be seen as powerful (intimidation)

# Expressing Liking for Others

We express our liking for others using both

Verbal flattery

Nonverbal behaviors such as smiling and mimicking their behavior

# Expressing Liking for Others

Researchers in one experiment

Primed half of the participants with a goal of being liked

Then led half of the participants in each group (primed and not primed) to feel as though they had failed at achieving a recent affiliative goal.

The researchers then recorded the extent to which the participants mimicked another's foot-shaking behavior.



Percentage  
of time spent  
shaking foot



People with the goal of being liked, who had recently failed at their goal, were most likely to mimic behavior.

*Lakin, J. L., & Chartrand, T. L. (2003)*



# Opinion Conformity as an Ingratiation Strategy

In an experiment conducted by Mark Zanna and Susan Pack (1975), women anticipated interacting with a man who was either:

Highly Desirable

Not Highly Desirable



# Opinion Conformity as an Ingratiation Strategy

And who held either:

Traditional views of women (believing the ideal woman to be a passive, emotional homebody)

Untraditional views of women (believing the ideal woman to be independent and ambitious).

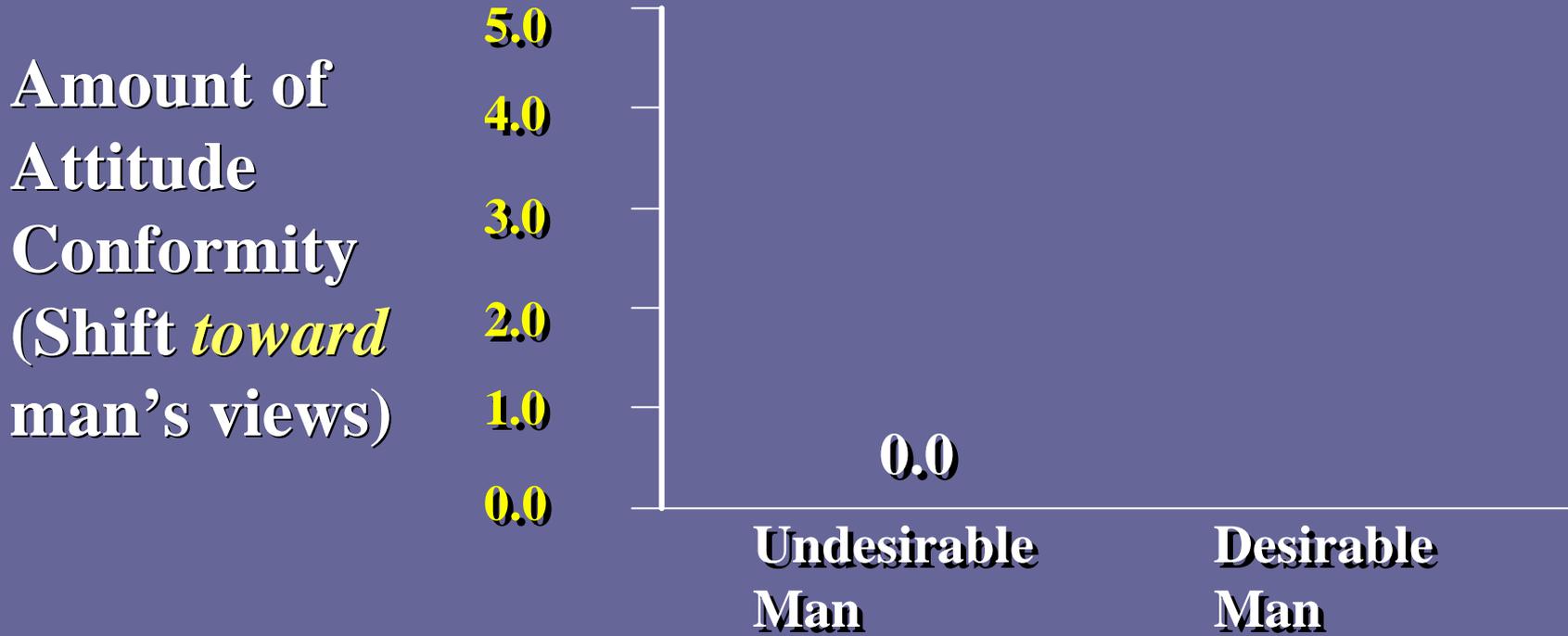


# Opinion Conformity as an Ingratiation Strategy

The women then filled out questionnaires for the male student to look at, including one reporting their own attitudes about gender roles.



# Opinion Conformity



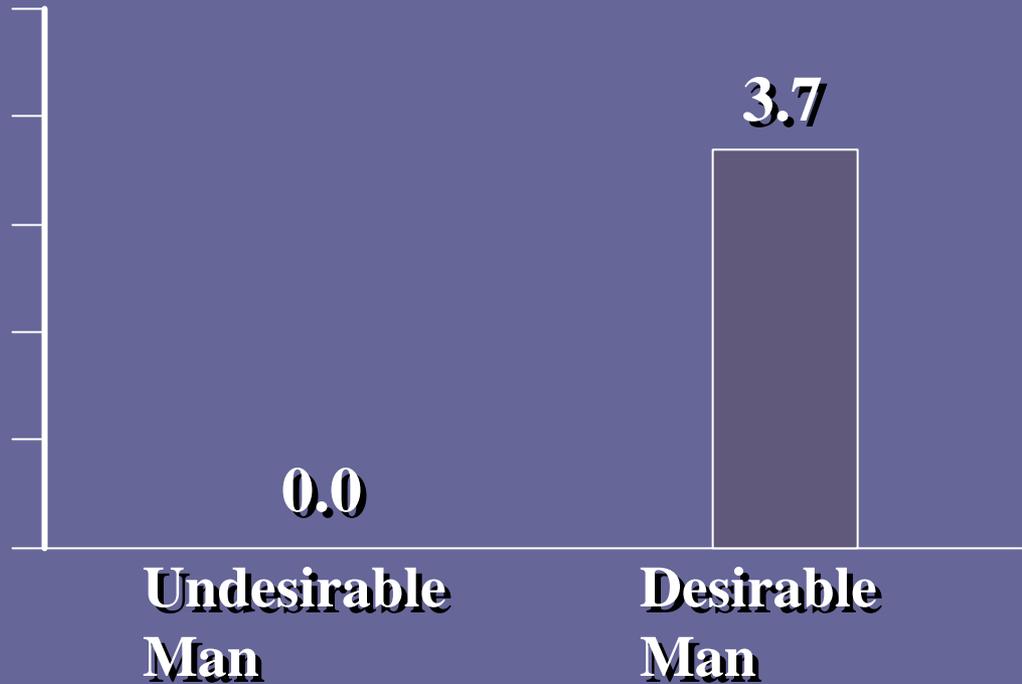
Women about to interact with the undesirable man did not shift their opinions.



# Opinion Conformity

Amount of  
Attitude  
Conformity  
(Shift *toward*  
man's views)

5.0  
4.0  
3.0  
2.0  
1.0  
0.0



However, women about to interact with the *desirable* man adjusted their opinions to match his more closely.



# Opinion Conformity

These findings indicate that

People realize that other people like those who are similar to them.

People sometimes change their public opinions to get desirable others to like them.

# Making Ourselves Physically Attractive

Attractive people receive many benefits, including:

They are seen as more honest.

They are more likely to be hired for managerial positions and elected to public office.

They receive shorter sentences for felonies.

# Making Ourselves Physically Attractive

Realizing this, most people try to make themselves more attractive.

In 2002, Americans had approximately 6.9 million plastic surgeries.

Five million Americans currently wear braces or other orthodontic devices.

People in the U.S. spend \$35 billion a year on diet foods, weight loss programs, and health club memberships.

# Projecting modesty

Cultural differences in modesty:

Compared to European Americans,  
African Americans are more tolerant  
of bragging.

Asian Americans are the most likely to  
project modesty.

# Making Excuses and Claiming Obstacles

*Self-handicapping* –  
the behavior of withdrawing effort  
or creating obstacles to one's future  
effort

# **Self-Handicapping: The Proactive Implementation of the Self-Serving Bias**

Response *after* success or failure is the self-serving bias: the tendency to take credit for success and less blame for failure than is really warranted.

Under some circumstances, people may strategically arrange the situation *before* the performance so that the resulting attributions are constrained to be self-serving.

Self-handicapping strategies ultimately have the effect of making failure more likely.

*Example:* A student, worried about an upcoming exam, decides to go out drinking the night before rather than studying.

Self-handicapping appears to be problematic because it makes it more likely that the student will perform poorly.

But, it may be that the student is more concerned about the evaluation of performance than the performance itself. Drinking instead of studying provides a convenient excuse in the event of failure.

# Attributions (judgments of behavior) Following Self-Handicapping

Following *failure*, the self-handicap provides an alternative explanation that leads to *discounting* of ability as the cause for the poor performance.

Following *success*, the self-handicap represents an inhibitory cause that leads to *augmenting* of ability as the cause for performance.

# *Why* Do People Self-Handicap?

Self-handicapping seems to arise most often in response to uncertainty about the likelihood of performing well.

# Making Excuses and Claiming Obstacles

Ways people self-handicap:

Taking condition-impairing drugs

Not practicing

Consuming alcohol

Choosing unattainable goals

Giving competitors a performance advantage

# Conspicuous Consumption

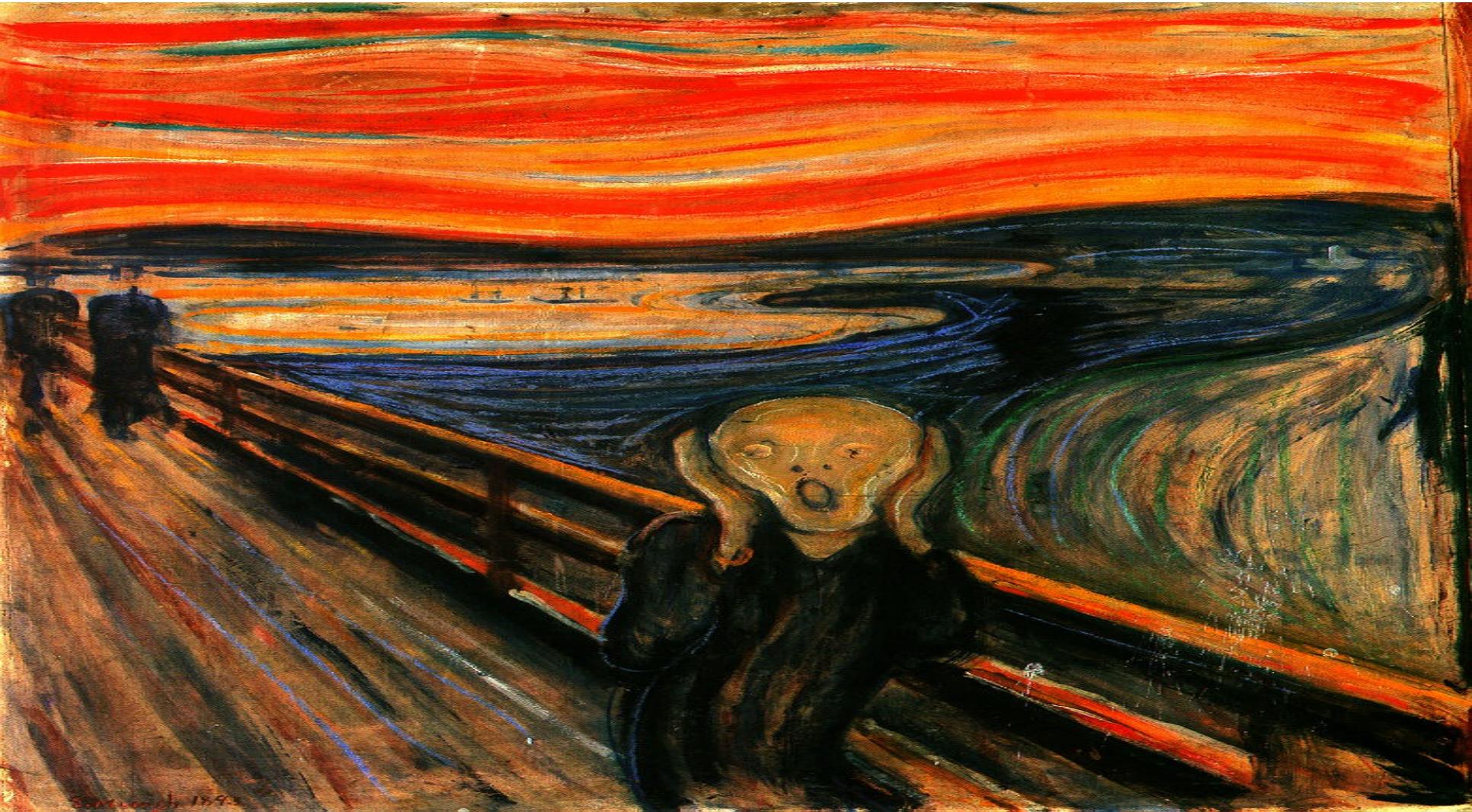
People often display their status through:

Spending lavishly on houses, automobiles, and burial chambers

Giving away and wasting money

Being generally wasteful, even to the point of damaging the environment

# Part II: Symbolic Interactionism



# Video Example

Scene from *The Sex  
Offender Next Door*

# Symbolic Interactionism: Five Central Ideas

- 1.) The role of social interaction. Approach does not focus on individuals and personality traits, or society and social situations, but on the nature of social interaction—the dynamic symbolic interaction among individuals.
- 2.) The role of thinking. Human action is caused not only by interaction between individuals, but by interaction within individuals.

# Symbolic Interactionism: Five Central Ideas

- 3.) The role of definition. Humans do not sense their environment directly; they define the situation as the action unfolds.
- 4.) The role of the present. What is going on right now in our present situation make the real difference.

# Symbolic Interactionism: Five Central Ideas

5.) The role of the active human being. Humans interact, think, define, apply his or her past to the present situation. Humans USE our environment rather than simply respond or react to it.

# Specific Assumptions

People are:

- 1.) unique creatures because of symbolic communication
- 2.) conscious and self-reflexive
- 3.) purposive creatures
- 4.) The “social act” should be the fundamental unit of analysis.
- 5.) Need methods to discern meanings people attribute to acts

# 1.) We are unique because of symbols

**Symbols are the representation of one thing for another thing. (e.g, a word for a object).**

While the social world is composed of material and objective features, what distinguishes humans is their extensive and creative use of communication through symbols.

# 1.) Symbols

**2.) Symbols make it possible to experience objects and events *without their physical presence.***

## VIDEO EXAMPLE:

The sex offense event could be reconstructed in the minds of the offenders neighbors.

The neighbors, although not at the event, had a fairly good idea about what had happened.

# 1.) Consider the problems these people faced because of symbolic labels

William Key is a jail warden, Cardinal Sin is an archbishop, Groaner Digger is an undertaker, I.C. Shivers is an iceman, Mrs. Screech is a singing teacher, A. Moron is a commissioner of education, Lavender Sidebottom is a masseuse, Seymour Smelsey is a cook.

2.) People are conscious and self-reflexive who shape their own behavior

The concept of the “self” is important to symbolic interactionists.

We develop the capacity to see and respond to ourselves as objects and thus interact with ourselves.

## 2.) The Self

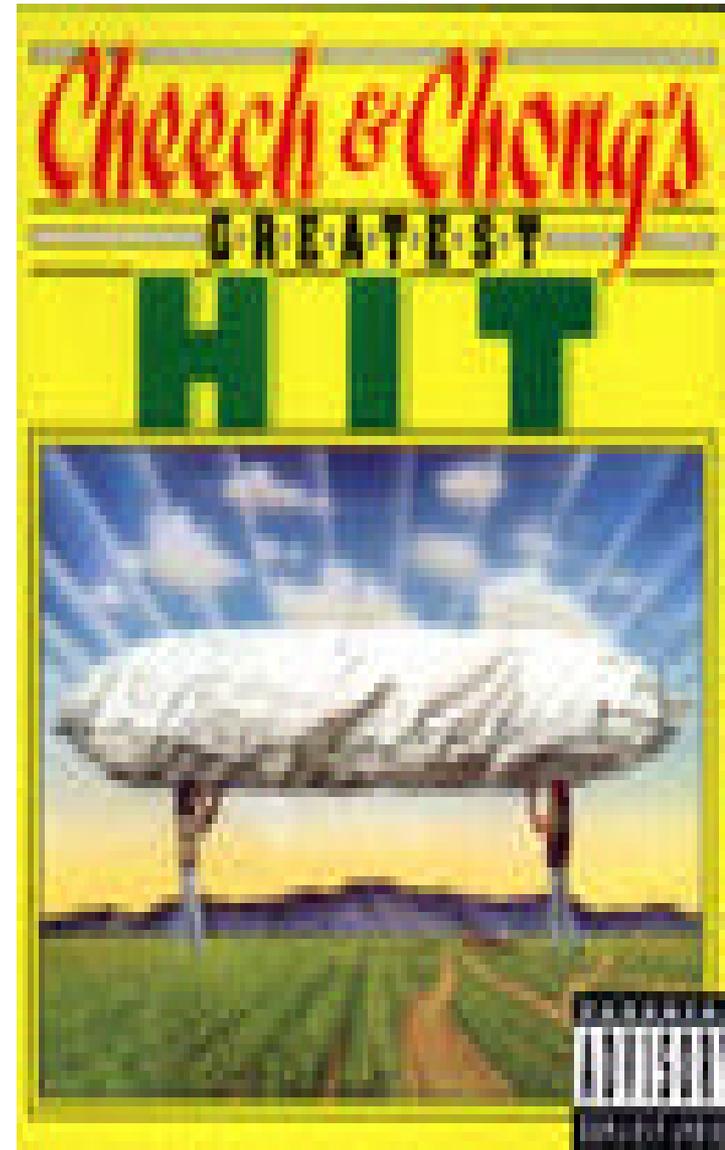
People take themselves into account when they act (e.g., they want to feel good about themselves).

Our self-concept arises when we interact with others and pay attention to how they treat (behave toward) us. (self-fulfilling prophecy)

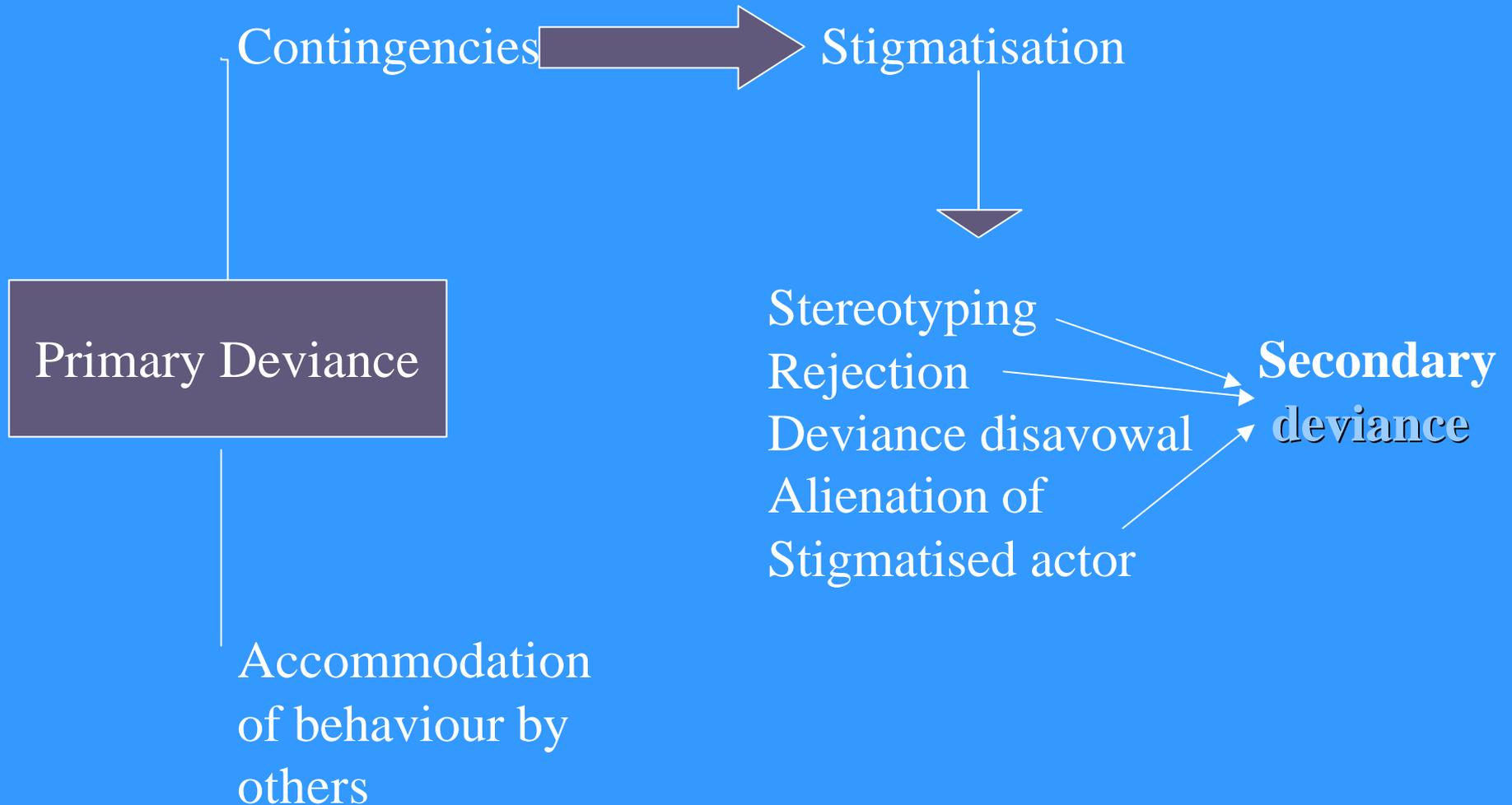
How might the hateful reaction from Jonathan's neighbors influence his self-concept?

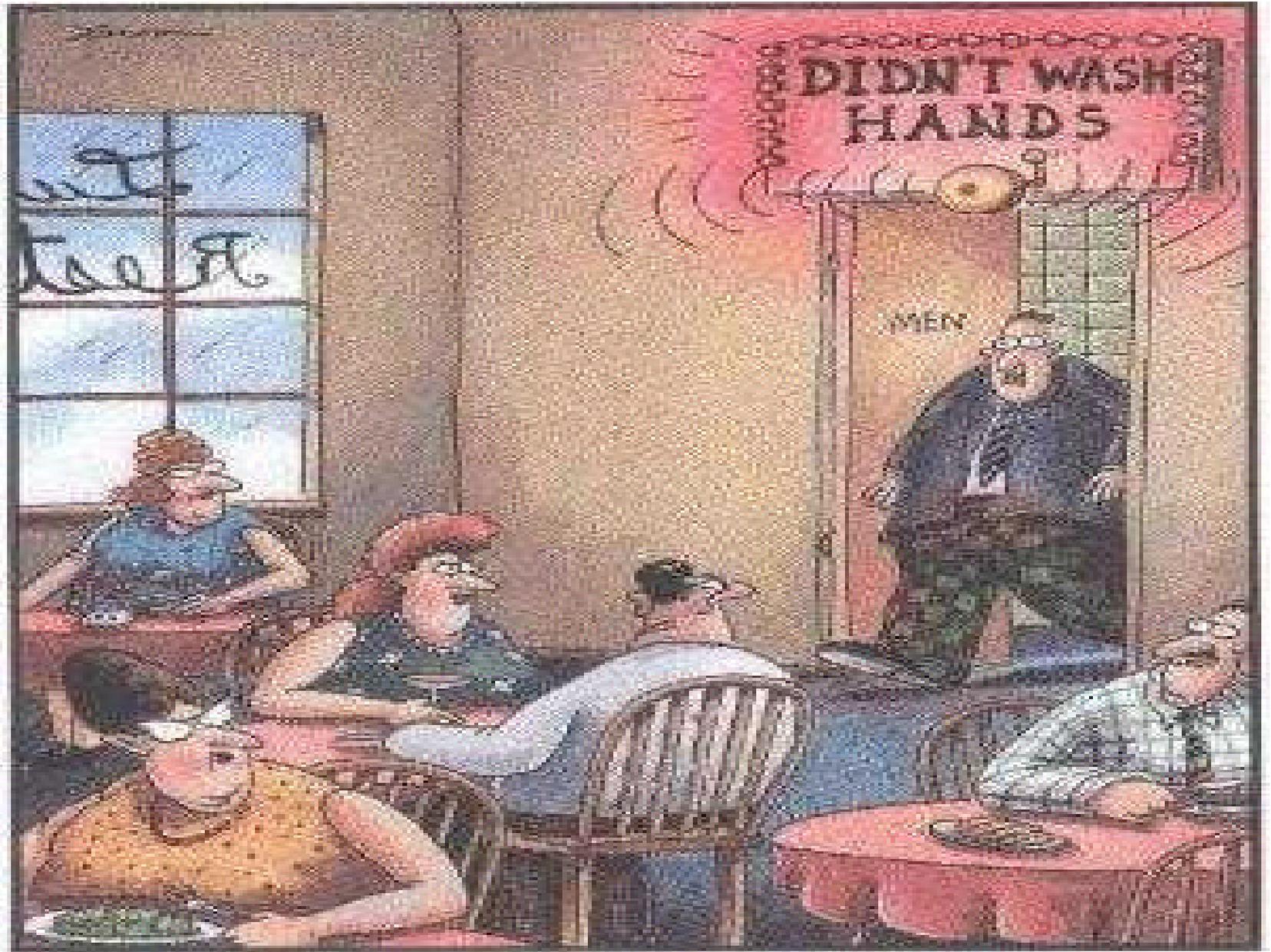
# Labeling Theory and the Self

Assumes that through the processes associated with symbolic interaction, individuals who are labeled, or stigmatized, will become increasingly “deviant” by societies standards.



# General Model of Labelling Theory





# 3.) People are purposive and act in and toward situations

**Humans do not react to the world directly, but rather to the meaning it has for them.**

In contrast to social learning theorists, interactionists believe that humans are forced to interpret their worlds rather than simply reacting to it.

People did not simply REACT to Jonathan Hawes by attacking him. They had meetings about him, and shared various interpretations about what it MEANS to have a sex offender in their neighborhood.

## 4.) The “social act” should be fundamental unit of analysis

A social act refers to behavior that in some way take account of others and is guided by what they do.

Examples include: a handshake, a party, a lecture, a fistfight, and even larger scale actions involving crowds, corporations, and religious movements.

# 5.) Methods are needed to discern the meanings people attribute to acts

Researchers must “take the role of” the individuals they are studying so that they can understand the meanings be created and shared.

Care must be taken so that the researchers and unobtrusive and that their interactions do not alter the situation under study.

# Symbolic Interactionism, in contrast to “psychological approaches” is:

- 1.) Symbolic interactionism is a social science perspective or paradigm, not a theory
- 2.) Inductive (exploratory, descriptive, search for patterns).
- 3.) Holistic (consider settings and qualities of people; incorporates a number of difference social forces in complex ways)
- 4.) Humanistic (search for meanings)

# Cont.

- 5.) Is less focused on experiments, and more on macro-level events and processes. Unit of analysis is typically the social act.
- 6.) Views that human behavior cannot solely be understood with objective science; symbols and subjective meanings mandate more interpretation when making decisions.

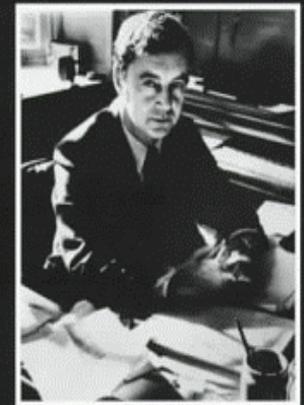
# Dramaturgy

Advocated by Erving Goffman

Humans are performers  
presenting images intended to  
influence other people's  
definition of the situation.

Social life is like an impromptu  
theatrical performance; we are  
like like performers on a stage

## *The* GOFFMAN READER



*Edited by*  
Charles Lemert and  
Ann Branaman



# Dramaturgy and the Self

Like other interactionists, Goffman believed that the self is the product of dramatic interaction between the actor and the audience.

Because the self is vulnerable to disruption during performance, individuals must engage in careful impression management techniques to protect themselves.

# Impression Management

Process where individuals engage in the purposeful manipulation of self-information

We highlight the good things and hide the bad things

Impression management accomplished by individuals controlling their physical appearance, their behavior, and their social environment.

# Metaphor of the Theatre

Front Stage: people engage in “impression management” presenting their selves in ways calculated to project favorable images and establish a particular “definition of the situation.” To Goffman, front stage situations are often highly structured by social expectations and roles.

Backstage: usually a “safe” place where people can step out of their roles and prepare for front stage encounters.

# Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity

Book focuses on the dramaturgical interaction between stigmatized people and “normals.”

# Stigma Defined

Stigma: any attribute, trait, or disorder that marks an individual as being unacceptably different from the 'normal' people with whom he or she routinely interacts, and elicits some form of community sanction.



# Types of Stigma

- 1.) Physical deformities (e.g., burnt skin, lost arm)
- 2.) Blemishes to individual character (e.g., dishonesty, sexual orientation, alcoholism, addiction, imprisonment)
- 3.) “Tribal” stigma of race, nation, religion or other social groups. (e.g., Kings vs. Lakers)

# Social Identity and Stigma

People form identities and categories of others as a result of symbolic interaction.

Categories that define different identities will ultimately lead to some individuals to be unusual.

# Example of Social Identity and Stigma

A middleclass boy may experience no worry about being seen going into a public library.

In contrast, a professional criminal writes:

“I can remember now on more than one occasion, for instance, going into a public library near where I was living, and looking over my shoulder before going in to make sure no one who knew me would see me do it”

# Discredited Stigma

Discredited Stigma: the actor assumes that the differences are known by the audience members (e.g., a person is in a wheelchair, their face is burned)

For the discredited, the dramaturgical problem is managing the tension produced by the fact that people know of the problem.

# Discreditable Stigma

The differences are neither known by the audience members nor perceived by them (e.g., a homosexual person passing as straight; a scientist who lied about his data).

For someone with a discreditable stigma, the dramaturgical problem is managing information so that the problem remains unknown to the audience.

# Discrepancies between virtual and actual identity

a) will always occur

b) will always give rise to the need of tension management in the case of the discredited

information control, in the case of the discreditable.