
ERVING GOFFMAN'S ENDURING LEGACY IN SOCIAL INTERACTION STUDIES

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Abstract

Erving Goffman (1922-1982) significantly shaped modern sociology through his contributions to microsociology, particularly his theories of symbolic interactionism and dramaturgical analysis. This article examines Goffman's theoretical frameworks, with a particular emphasis on his dramaturgical analysis, which likens social interactions to theatrical performances, and his frame analysis, which investigates how individuals construct and interpret social realities. The research is based on a qualitative analysis and key scholarly interpretations (comparative, textual, and conceptual). Drawing from the Chicago School of Sociology, Goffman's work integrates insights from Max Weber and George Herbert Mead to analyze how individuals navigate social roles, stigmas, and institutional structures.

Keywords

Dramaturgical analysis; Symbolic interactionism; Social stigma; Performance studies; Micro-sociological theory.

Introduction

Erving Goffman, a towering figure in the 20th-century sociology, revolutionized the study of social interactions through his micro-sociological lens. Born in 1922 to a Ukrainian-Jewish family in Canada, Goffman's academic journey led him to become a professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, and later at the University of Pennsylvania. His work, deeply rooted in the Chicago School of Sociology, emphasized the micro-level interactions that shape social life. The Chicago School of Sociology, flourishing from the 1890s to the 1930s, profoundly shaped modern sociology through its pioneering empirical and ethnographic approaches to urban social phenomena. Its principal achievement lies in establishing symbolic interactionism. Grounded in pragmatist philosophy, particularly John Dewey's (1859-1952) theories, and innovative fieldwork methodologies, the School produced seminal studies on urban dynamics, deviance, and social reform, laying foundational principles for qualitative sociological inquiry and micro-level analysis.

Erving Goffman's two seminal theoretical contributions—symbolic interactionism and dramaturgical analysis—offer profound insights into how individuals construct their identities and navigate societal expectations. Goffman's symbolic interactionism, inspired by Weber (2001) and Mead (1967), posits that individuals perceive and construct social reality through interactions mediated by symbols, gestures, and language. His dramaturgical analysis, articulated in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1959), likens social life to a theatrical performance, where individuals adopt roles, wear social “masks”, and perform on

societal “*stages*” to manage impressions. Additionally, his concept of “*frame analysis*”, introduced in *Frame Analysis* (Goffman, 1974), examines how individuals organize their experiences within socially constructed frameworks, or “*frames*”, that shape their perceptions of reality. These theories have been instrumental in understanding social phenomena, from everyday interactions to the stigmatization of marginalized groups and the dynamics of institutional control (Goffman, 1986).

This study offers a unique contribution to Goffmanian scholarship by systematically situating Erving Goffman’s micro-sociological frameworks within a classical structural-functionalist tradition, specifically the Weber-Merton-Parsons lineage. While Goffman is often celebrated for his micro-level insights, this research distinctively highlights his unique contribution to bridging the dynamics between individuals and society. It achieves this by reconceptualizing Goffman’s descriptions of social “*transformations*” not merely as role-playing, but as a form of modern tricksterism—a strategic navigation and subversion of institutional scripts. This perspective highlights the inherent tension between agency and structure, a theme that is often underdeveloped in secondary literature.

The author’s interest in Erving Goffman stemmed from a desire to understand micro-social relationships. Interpersonal communication is founded on will (or instincts), while reason (ratio) is often inert. This led the author to investigate why reactions and reactology (the moment of response to a stimulus) are unique and vary from individual to individual (Ukhtomsky, 2019). Furthermore, Goffman provided an analysis of a class “*for itself*” and a class “*in itself*” (Lukács, 1968). The class “*for itself*” is a passive group of people who perform the imposed patterns of their relationships (familial, professional, etc.). This class lacks self-awareness and is subordinate to others. In contrast, the class “*in itself*” is conscious of its role and, therefore, possesses and strives to fulfill tasks and set objectives. This class acts as a guide (a pastor) for the class “*for itself*” (Lukács, 1968). This dynamics ultimately reinforces the principle that “*La vita è un gioco.*” (“*Life is a game.*”), where social existence is a performance with defined roles, rules, and players of varying awareness (Dante, 1932). The micro- and macro-worlds are imperceptibly yet perpetually interconnected, with one flowing into the other. No community can escape the idols of the tribe, idols of the marketplace, and idols of the theatre (Bacon, 1977, 1978). To control the minds of the populace, one must control and shape public opinion. “*Public opinion*” is an instrument of suggestion and obsession, an unfailing tool for opening the “*social safety valve of tension*” (Plekhanov, 1938). The ruling elite channels social tension through goods, products, services, social networks, and so forth, prolonging the power in this world. All of this was revealed to the author through the study of Goffman’s work (Goffman 1959; Goffman, 1974; Lenin, 2022; Lippmann, 1998). Those who desire *Herrschaft* (*the will to power*), who are ambitious and Caesarian in their disposition, will inevitably engage with the socio-philosophical legacy of Goffman.

The main aim of this article is to examine Goffman’s theoretical frameworks, with a particular emphasis on his dramaturgical analysis and frame analysis.

First, the literature review refers to key areas of Goffman’s frameworks in Section 1. The following Section 2 presents research questions and methodology of this work. Next, the results of a qualitative literature review are presented in Section 3. Finally, Section 4 shows the reflections of Goffman’s theories in the works of contemporary authors and explains its differences from the works of the authors of the past. Section “Conclusion” summarizes the importance of Goffman’s findings for understanding interpersonal interactions in the contemporary world and outlines the directions for further research.

1 Literature Review

The literature review focuses on the following key areas:

- Erving Goffman's **dramaturgical analysis** conceptualizes social interactions as theatrical performances. Individuals act as performers, adopting roles and employing "*masks*" to manage impressions before an audience, such as their social circle or society. Drawing from symbolic interactionism, this framework emphasizes "*impression management*", where individuals craft a "*front*" through appearance and behavior to project desired identities, see Subsection 3.1.
- Goffman's **frame analysis** explores how individuals construct and interpret social reality through cognitive and social "*frames*". These frames define the meaning of situations, shaping perceptions and actions. Frames can be manipulated, as seen in "*frame fabrication*", where institutions create artificial realities to maintain power, such as in total institutions like prisons, see Subsection 3.2.
- **Stigmatization** acts as a mechanism of social control, where dominant groups impose negative labels to maintain power. Individuals with stigmatized identities (e.g., disability, minority status) use strategies like "*passing*" (concealing stigma) or "*covering*" (minimizing its visibility) to gain acceptance, reflecting the interplay between personal agency and societal norms. Goffman examines how societal labels marginalize individuals, creating a "*spoiled identity*", see Subsection 3.3.
- The **contemporary relevance of Goffman's sociological research** examines the enduring significance of Erving Goffman's theories in modern contexts. Stigmatization remains pertinent in identity politics, with marginalized groups navigating "*spoiled identities*", see Subsection 3.4.
- Goffman's work bridges micro-level interactions and macro-level structures (**micro-macro linkages**). Everyday rituals and frames reinforce societal norms, see Subsection 3.5.

The analysis compares Goffman's frameworks with predecessors and contemporaries. Weber's interpretive social action (Weber, 2001) and Mead's concept of the "*self*" (Mead, 1967) underpin Goffman's symbolic interactionism, emphasizing meaning-making in interactions. Unlike Durkheim's macro-level social facts (Durkheim, 1997) or Parsons' structural-functionalism in *The Social System* (Parsons, 1964) originally published in 1951, Goffman prioritizes micro-level agency, aligning closely with Blumer's symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). These comparisons, alongside recent works (Smith, 2022; Inglis & Thorpe, 2023; Shalin, 2023; Guise, 2024; Gran, 2025). Recent scholarship further validates and extends Erving Goffman's theories.

2 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative literature review methodology to analyze Erving Goffman's sociological theories, with a focus on his dramaturgical and frame analysis perspectives.

The author formulated the following research questions:

1. How do Erving Goffman's dramaturgical and frame analysis frameworks explain social interactions?
2. To what extent do these frameworks bridge micro-level interactions and macro-level societal structures?
3. How applicable are Goffman's theories to contemporary digital and globalized contexts?

The qualitative approach enables a thorough examination of Goffman's theories, providing a solid foundation for understanding their significance and contemporary relevance.

The methodology involves the following steps:

1. **Literature selection:** Primary sources include Erving Goffman's key works: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1959), *Interaction Ritual* (Goffman, 1967), *Stigma* (Goffman, 1986), *Strategic Interaction* (Goffman, 1969), *Forms of Talk* (Goffman, 1981), and *Frame Analysis* (Goffman, 1974). Secondary sources comprise historical analyses by Russian sociologists (Batygin, 2001; Vahstein, 2003; Vahstein, 2007; Rogozin, 2005; Yadow, 2011) and international scholars (Burns, 1991; Scheff, 2006; Shalin, 2023; Inglis & Thorpe, 2023; Guise, 2024; Gran, 2025).
2. **Data analysis:** The analysis synthesizes Goffman's concepts by identifying recurring themes, such as social roles, impression management, stigmatization, and frame construction. The study compares Goffman's ideas with those of his intellectual predecessors (e.g., Weber, Mead, Durkheim) and contemporaries (e.g., Blumer, Parsons) to contextualize his contributions within the broader sociological tradition.
3. **Thematic focus:** The review focuses on two primary frameworks—dramaturgical analysis and frame analysis—examining their theoretical foundations, methodological implications, and applications to social phenomena. Special attention is given to how these frameworks address micro-macro linkages, such as the interplay between individual agency and societal structures.
4. **Contemporary relevance:** The study assesses the applicability of Goffman's theories to modern contexts, incorporating recent works on digital platforms (Gran, 2025), health disparities (Guise, 2024), and interdisciplinary impacts (Shalin, 2023), extending historical analyses to virtual and globalized societies.
5. **Ethical considerations:** As a literature-based study, no human subjects were involved, and ethical concerns are minimal. The analysis adheres to academic integrity by ensuring proper citation of all sources and maintaining the originality of the synthesis.

3 Results

3.1 Dramaturgical Analysis: Social Life as Theater

Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, introduced in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, conceptualizes social interactions as theatrical performances. Individuals act as performers, adopting roles and wearing social "masks" to manage impressions in front of an audience—their social circle or society at large. This framework draws heavily on symbolic interactionism, particularly Mead's notion that the "self" emerges through social interactions (Mead, 1967). Goffman argues that individuals engage in "impression management" to align their behavior with societal expectations, creating a "front" (by appearance, manner) that projects a desired identity. The dramaturgical model highlights the tension between how individuals perceive themselves and how others perceive them. For instance, Erving Goffman's personal anecdote about presenting oneself as a successful businessman rather than a sociology professor to appeal to a particular social group illustrates the strategic adoption of roles to achieve social goals (Goffman, 1969). This concept resonates with Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) ideas of "tricksterism", where individuals manipulate social roles to navigate or subvert societal norms (Bakhtin, 2009). Goffman's *Interaction Ritual* (Goffman, 1967) further develops this idea by exploring how everyday interactions are governed by unspoken rituals that maintain social order.

These rituals, such as greetings or apologies, reinforce social norms and create a shared sense of reality. However, they also constrain individual agency, as societal expectations often compel individuals to conform to a “*middle-ground*” morality that suppresses personal values for the sake of social harmony. This aligns with Paul Ricoeur’s (1913-2005) philosophy of narrative identity, where individuals construct their sense of self through interactions shaped by societal narratives (Ricoeur, 1990).

In modern contexts, the dramaturgical perspective is particularly relevant to digital interactions. Social media platforms like X serve as virtual stages where users curate their “*fronts*” through posts, images, and profiles (Goffman, 1981). The pressure to perform an idealized self online mirrors Goffman’s concept of impression management, with users navigating the tension between authenticity and societal expectations. For example, influencers often adopt personas that align with market demands, reflecting Goffman’s notion of “*strategic interaction*” (Goffman, 1969).

3.2 Frame Analysis: Constructing Social Reality

Erving Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* (Goffman, 1974) introduces the concept of frames as cognitive and social structures that organize individuals’ perceptions of reality. Frames define “*what is going on*” in a given situation, shaping how individuals interpret events and act within them. Building on Gregory Bateson’s earlier use of the term (Bateson, 2000), Goffman argues that frames are both objective (reflecting societal structures) and subjective (dependent on individual involvement). For instance, a protest march can be framed as a legitimate expression of dissent or a disruptive act, depending on the perspective of the participants and observers. Frames operate at multiple levels—“*micro*”, “*meso*”, and “*macro*”—mediating the relationship between individual agency and societal structures. At the micro-level, frames guide everyday interactions, such as how a conversation is interpreted as friendly or hostile. At the “*meso level*”, institutions like schools or workplaces impose frames that dictate acceptable behavior. At the “*macro level*”, frames shape collective phenomena, such as political movements or media narratives, which are often manipulated to serve the interests of dominant groups. Goffman’s “*frame analysis*” is particularly relevant to understanding contemporary phenomena, such as media manipulation and identity politics. For example, political campaigns use frames to shape public opinion, presenting issues in ways that align with their agendas. Similarly, social movements, such as those advocating for racial or gender equality, challenge dominant frames to redefine societal norms. The concept of “*frame fabrication*” highlights how institutions create artificial realities to maintain power, a process Goffman critiques in *Asylums* (Goffman, 2007) when discussing the total institutionalization of individuals in mental hospitals or prisons. The central thesis of *Asylums* (Goffman, 2007), initially published in 1961, is that total institutions do not merely isolate people; they actively engage in the “*breaking down*” and “*rebuilding*” of the “*self*”. This process, which Goffman terms the “*moral career*” of the inmate or patient, begins with a ritual of “*mortification of the self*”. Upon admission, individuals are stripped of their civilian clothes, personal possessions, social status, and autonomy. These are replaced with a uniform, an identification number, and a rigid daily schedule. The goal is to erase the prior identity to make the individual manageable. It is this concept of “*frame fabrication*”—the creation of artificial realities to maintain power.

3.3 Stigmatization and Social Control

Erving Goffman’s *Stigma* (Goffman, 1986) examines how societal labels marginalize individuals, forcing them to navigate a “*spoiled identity*”. Stigmatization serves as a mechanism of social control, where dominant groups impose negative labels on minorities to maintain power. For instance, Goffman describes how individuals with stigmatized identities, such as

mental illness or disability, engage in strategies like “*passing*” (concealing the stigma) or “*covering*” (minimizing its visibility) to gain social acceptance. This concept remains highly relevant in contemporary discussions of identity politics. Marginalized groups, such as racial minorities or the LGBTQ+ community, often face stigmatization that shapes their social interactions. Goffman’s framework provides a lens to analyze how these groups resist stigmatization through activism or by reframing their identities in favorable terms. For example, the reclamation of terms like “*queer*” reflects a shift in framing, challenging societal norms and creating new social realities.

3.4 Contemporary Relevance of Goffman’s Sociological Research

Erving Goffman’s sociological theories remain profoundly relevant in the 21st century, offering a lens to understand the complexities of modern social interactions in an increasingly interconnected and digital world. His concepts of dramaturgical analysis, frame analysis, and stigmatization provide tools for analyzing phenomena ranging from online self-presentation to global social movements, making his work a cornerstone of contemporary sociological inquiry. The enduring applicability of Goffman’s ideas lies in their ability to illuminate how individuals navigate the tension between personal identity and societal expectations, a dynamic that has only intensified with technological advancements and globalization. In the digital age, Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective is particularly illuminating. Social media platforms have transformed everyday interactions into obvious performances, where individuals meticulously curate their online personas. On platforms like X (formerly Twitter) or Facebook, users select images, craft posts, and engage in interactions that project a desired identity, much like actors on a stage. This digital stage amplifies the pressure to perform, as individuals must balance authenticity with the expectations of a diverse and often global audience. For instance, professionals may present themselves as competent and innovative to attract career opportunities, while younger users might adopt trendy personas to gain social capital. Goffman’s concept of impression management explains how these performances are strategic, designed to elicit specific responses from virtual audiences. Moreover, the anonymity and flexibility of online spaces allow individuals to experiment with multiple “*masks*”, reinforcing Goffman’s idea of role-playing as a means of navigating social contexts.

Goffman’s “*frame analysis*” is equally pertinent in understanding how modern societies construct and contest reality. In an era of information overload, frames shape public perceptions of critical issues, from climate change to social justice. Media outlets, political leaders, and influencers compete to impose frames that align with their agendas, thereby influencing how events are perceived and interpreted. For example, a natural disaster might be framed by activists as a call for environmental action or by industries as an unavoidable act of nature, seeking to deflect responsibility. These competing frames, which Goffman would describe as “*fabrications*”, highlight the power dynamics inherent in shaping social reality: social movements, particularly those amplified through digital platforms, leverage frame analysis to challenge dominant narratives. Movements like *Black Lives Matter* or *#MeToo* have successfully reframed issues of race and gender, shifting public discourse and policy priorities by redefining what is at stake in these struggles. The concept of stigmatization remains a vital tool for analyzing contemporary identity politics. Marginalized groups continue to face labels that mark them as “*other*”, whether based on race, gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status. Goffman’s insights into how individuals manage spoiled identities through strategies like passing or covering are evident in the experiences of minorities navigating hostile social environments. For instance, transgender individuals may choose to conceal their gender identity in professional settings to avoid discrimination, a straightforward application of Goffman’s “*passing*” strategy. Conversely, the growing visibility of pride movements reflects efforts to reframe stigmatized identities as sources of empowerment, aligning with Goffman’s idea of

challenging societal norms through collective action. These dynamics are particularly pronounced in digital spaces, where marginalized voices can gain traction but also face amplified stigmatization through online harassment or trolling.

Erving Goffman's emphasis on "*micro-macro linkages*" offers a framework for understanding how individual actions contribute to broader societal changes. In globalized societies, where interactions transcend geographic boundaries, his theories help explain how local performances and frames ripple outward to influence global narratives. For instance, a viral social media campaign can begin as a single individual's performance but evolve into a global movement, reshaping societal norms around issues such as mental health or environmental sustainability. Similarly, institutional power dynamics, such as those in workplaces or governments, rely on "*micro-level interactions*"—meetings, memos, or public speeches—to reinforce "*macro-level control*". Goffman's work highlights how these interactions are not isolated but part of a larger system that sustains or challenges power structures.

The rise of artificial intelligence and virtual reality further underscores the relevance of Goffman's theories. In virtual environments, individuals create avatars that serve as digital "*fronts*", allowing them to experiment with identities in ways that mirror Goffman's dramaturgical model. These technologies also introduce new frames, as users navigate virtual worlds with distinct rules and expectations. For example, a virtual meeting may require different performative behaviors than an in-person one, yet the underlying principles of impression management remain the same. As societies grapple with the ethical implications of these technologies, Goffman's insight into how frames shape perceptions of reality can guide discussions on authenticity, privacy, and social control in digital spaces. Erving Goffman's sociological research continues to resonate because it addresses universal aspects of human interaction—performance, perception, and power—while remaining adaptable to new social and technological contexts.

3.5 Micro-Macro Linkages

Goffman's work bridges the *micro-* and *macro-levels* of sociological analysis. His focus on everyday interactions reveals how micro-level behaviors contribute to the formation of macro-level social structures. For instance, the rituals and frames that govern individual interactions reinforce societal norms, which in turn sustain institutional power. This perspective aligns with Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness, where shared beliefs and practices create social cohesion (Durkheim, 1997), and Weber's emphasis on the role of meaning in social action. In contemporary sociology, Goffman's theories provide a framework for analyzing globalized and digital societies. The rise of social media has amplified the performative aspects of social life, with platforms like X enabling individuals to construct and broadcast their identities to a global audience. Similarly, frame analysis is crucial for understanding how global issues, such as climate change or migration, are presented in media and political discourse, thereby influencing public perceptions and policy outcomes.

3.6 The Sociological Evolution of Erving Goffman: A Humane Comparative Lens

Erving Goffman's theories, rooted in the dramaturgical metaphor and frame analysis, represent a humane pivot toward the individual's lived experience—*homo sapiens in actu*, as it were—amidst the grand architectures of societal structures. To trace Goffman's development is to engage in a dialectical interplay, comparing his insights with those of "titans": Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883), Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), Max Weber (1864-1920), Herbert George Blumer (1900-1978), Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), Gregory Bateson (1904-1980), Robert King Merton (1910-2003) and Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998).

Beginning with Karl Marx, whose materialist dialectic exposed the class struggles underpinning *Gesellschaft*—a German term for *society as an impersonal aggregate*—Goffman’s work diverges profoundly yet humanely. Marx’s emphasis on economic determinism and alienation (*Entfremdung*) views human interactions as epiphenomena of production relations, where the proletariat endures exploitation *sui generis*, in its own right (Marx, 1977). Goffman, however, inverts this macro-perspective, focusing on the *micro-dramas* of impression management, as in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Where Marx sees systemic oppression, Goffman perceives the individual’s strategic performances—*le jeu social*, *the social game*—in everyday rituals, rendering sociology more empathetic to personal agency. However, Goffman’s tacit acknowledgment of institutional power echoes Marx’s critique, humanizing it by showing how stigma perpetuates inequality through subtle, interpersonal mechanisms rather than overt class warfare.

Herbert Spencer, the evolutionary positivist who coined the phrase “*survival of the fittest*”, posited society as an organism evolving toward greater complexity, a *laissez-faire* vision of progress (Spencer, 2004). Spencer’s organic analogy—*societas ut corpus*, *society as a body*—treats individuals as functional parts in a self-regulating whole, devoid of humane nuance. Goffman critiques this implicitly by highlighting the precariousness of social order, not as an inevitable evolution but as fragile performances prone to disruption (Spencer, 2004). In *Asylums* (Goffman, 2007), Goffman exposes total institutions as dehumanizing, where inmates navigate “*moral careers*” amid coercive structures—a far cry from Spencer’s optimistic adaptation. Goffman’s humane lens reveals the human cost of such “*evolution*”, emphasizing empathy for the stigmatized over abstract progress.

Émile Durkheim, the French founder of sociology as a discipline, introduced the concept of *faits sociaux*—*social facts*—as external constraints *sui generis*, independent of individual will. Durkheim’s anomie theory in *Suicide* underscores collective conscience over personal agency (Durkheim, 1997). Goffman builds upon this and humanizes it by shifting to the micro-level: interactions as rituals sustaining social solidarity, as in *Interaction Ritual*. Where Durkheim sees mechanical solidarity in pre-modern societies, Goffman observes the dramaturgical labor—*Arbeit der Präsentation*, the work of presentation—that individuals perform to avoid embarrassment, infusing Durkheim’s structuralism with compassionate insight into emotional vulnerabilities (Durkheim, 1997).

George Mead, a cornerstone of symbolic interactionism, profoundly shaped Erving Goffman’s sociological imagination. Mead’s concept of the “*self*” as emergent through social interaction—via the “*I*” and “*me*”—underpins Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis. In *Mind, Self, and Society* (Mead, 1967), Mead posits that individuals internalize societal expectations through role-taking, a process Goffman humanizes in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Where Mead theorizes the generalized other, Goffman vividly illustrates its enactment in everyday performances, infusing Mead’s abstraction with *humane, interactional nuance* (Mead, 1967).

Max Weber, with his concept of *Verstehen*—*interpretive understanding*—bridged the structure and action, analyzing bureaucracy and rationalization as an “*iron cage*” / “*stahlhartes Gehäuse*” (Weber, 2001). Goffman’s symbolic interactionism echoes Weber’s focus on meaning-making, but humanely grounds it in everyday *Verhaltensweisen*, *behaviors* (Weber, 2001). In *Frame Analysis* Goffman dissects how individuals negotiate frames amid Weberian disenchantment, transforming Weber’s *macro-rationality* into *micro-strategies* of *self-presentation*, with a tender regard for human fallibility.

While Herbert Blumer famously codified the principles of symbolic interactionism, it was his student, Erving Goffman, who provided its most enduring empirical architecture. Blumer’s foundational concept of the “*self*” as a social process finds its dramatic (Blumer, 1969),

humanized enactment in Goffman's dramaturgical model. Where Blumer articulated the theoretical framework—that meaning arises from interaction—Goffman meticulously documented the intricate “*scripts*” of everyday life. He moved the lens from abstract interpretive processes to the palpable, often anxious, human actor managing a “*front stage*” performance while fearing exposure “*backstage*”. This was not a departure from Blumer, but a profound sociological evolution (Blumer, 1969). Goffman translated his mentor's ideas into a humane comparative lens, allowing us to see the universal human struggle for dignity and coherence within social structures. By comparing the person with a mental health condition to the hotel clerk and the aristocrat to the convict, he revealed the shared, often precarious, work of impression management. In doing so, Goffman shifted symbolic interactionism from a philosophy of mind to a deeply compassionate sociology of situation, giving tangible and poignant form to Blumer's most abstract claims about the social self (Blumer, 1969).

Talcott Parsons, the structural-functionalist, modeled society as a system of AGIL functions—adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency (Parsons, 1964). Parsons' grand theory abstracts human action into roles, lacking humane depth. Goffman critiques this by vivifying roles as performances, not fixed functions. In *Stigma* Goffman (1986) humanely explores the “*spoiled identity*”, revealing the emotional toll of deviance in Parsons' integrated system.

Gregory Bateson provided a foundational concept that Goffman would adapt and apply to sociology. Bateson's seminal work, particularly in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (2000), introduced the notion of the “*frame*” as a metacommunicative signal that defines the context for understanding a message. Drawing from his anthropological fieldwork and studies of animal communication, Bateson illustrated how a playful nip between monkeys is framed differently from a combative bite. However, physical actions may be similar. This concept, which he developed as early as 1955, posits that frames are psychological and communicative structures that organize perception and meaning, allowing individuals to discern what is happening in any given interaction (Bateson, 2000). Goffman, in his *Frame Analysis*, humanizes and expands Bateson's primarily psychological and communicative model into a full-fledged sociological apparatus (Bateson, 2000). Where Bateson focused on the cognitive and cybernetic rules of communication, Goffman transposed the concept onto the stage of everyday social life. He detailed how these frames are not just individual cognitive tools but are socially sustained, negotiated, and often manipulated within institutions and cultures. Goffman thus took Bateson's elegant, systemic insight and embedded it within the messy, ritualized, and power-laden dramas of human interaction, revealing the fragile, constructed nature of social reality itself.

Robert Merton, refining functionalism with middle-range theories, introduced the concepts of manifest and latent functions, as seen in his *anomie revisions* (Merton, 1968). Merton's humane pragmatism aligns with Goffman's emphasis on the unintended consequences of interactions. However, Goffman deepens it by emphasizing the interpersonal, *vis-à-vis*, *face-to-face* dynamics, making sociology more attuned to individual suffering.

Niklas Luhmann, the systems theorist, viewed society as *autopoietic* (αὐτός-ποίησις) systems of communication, reducing individuals to psychic systems outside society proper (Luhmann, 1996). Luhmann's cold functionalism—*autopoiesis* as *self-reproduction*—contrasts with Goffman's humane warmth: where Luhmann abstracts communication, Goffman humanizes it as ritualized encounters, bridging the psychic and social with empathy for the human condition.

In essence, Erving Goffman's evolution humanizes sociology's giants, transforming their *macro-abstractions* into *micro-narratives* of vulnerability. His work, *eudaimonia in praxis*—*flourishing in practice*—reminds us that society is not merely structures but people navigating.

4 Discussion

Recent scholarship extends Erving Goffman's frameworks, affirming their adaptability while highlighting areas for critique. Smith (2022) examines the fictional elements in Goffman's dramaturgical analysis, highlighting its narrative depth in analyzing social performances. Inglis & Thorpe (2023) advocate applying Goffman's micro-insights to macro-level theorizing, particularly in institutional power dynamics. Shalin (2023) underscores Goffman's interdisciplinary influence, emphasizing his impact on ethnographic studies of interactionism. Andy Guise (2024) integrates Goffman's concept of stigma with Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) structural theory, exploring its role in health inequalities. Anne-Britt Gran (2025) adapts Goffman's dramaturgical model to social media, proposing a typology of digital identities. Recent studies (Smith, 2022; Inglis & Thorpe, 2023; Shalin, 2023; Guise, 2024; Gran, 2025) affirm Goffman's enduring impact across disciplines, while highlighting the need for empirical, structural, and global extensions to address modern complexities, such as the influence of algorithms and cross-cultural applicability.

Greg Smith (2022) explores Goffman's use of fiction in dramaturgical analysis, arguing that his metaphors, such as the theatrical stage, draw on literary devices to illuminate social performances. Smith posits that this fictional lens enhances the interpretive depth of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1959), allowing sociologists to analyze social interactions as narrative constructs. However, Smith's focus on fiction suggests a potential over-reliance on metaphor, which could risk oversimplifying complex social realities. This critique underscores a limitation of Goffman's approach: while vivid, his dramaturgical model may prioritize aesthetic over structural analysis.

David Inglis and Christopher Thorpe (Inglis & Thorpe, 2023) advance Goffman's legacy by advocating for "*social theorizing in a Goffmanesque manner*", applying his micro-sociological insights to broader social theory. They argue that Goffman's focus on everyday interactions can inform *macro-level* theorizing, particularly in understanding power dynamics in institutional settings. Their work complements the author's study of *micro-macro* linkages by showing how Goffman's concepts bridge individual agency and systemic structures, yet they critique his limited engagement with globalized contexts. This resonates with the author's analysis. However, Inglis & Thorpe (2023) highlight a gap: Goffman's frameworks may not fully account for algorithmic influences in modern societies, a limitation that the authors' qualitative synthesis also faces.

Dmitri Shalin (2023) assesses Goffman's interdisciplinary impact as a "*social science maverick*", emphasizing his enduring influence on ethnography and interactionism and portraying Goffman's "*face-work*" as a versatile tool for analyzing relational dynamics in marginalized contexts. Unlike the author's literature-based approach, Shalin's citation analysis suggests that empirical metrics could strengthen the author's findings.

Andy Guise (2024) integrates Goffman's concept of stigma with Bourdieu's theory, viewing it as a form of structural power within social fields. Guise argues that stigma is not merely interpersonal but a form of power enacted through social fields, where dominant habitus—embodied dispositions—reproduces exclusion via *violence symbolique* (*symbolic violence*). Guise advocates integrated analyses to map *champs* (*fields*) and *capitaux* (*capitals*), fostering "*symbolic revolutions*" through *habitus-field mismatches* and "*prophets*" who disrupt norms, critiquing Goffman's *micro-bias*. This complements the author's macro-theoretical comparisons, but highlights a limitation of the author's study: the lack of structural analysis.

Anne-Britt Gran (2025) reinterprets Goffman's dramaturgical analysis for social media, proposing a typology that ranges from "*not-not-me*" identities—blending *front-* and *backstage performances*—to curated digital personas. Gran critiques Goffman's limited account of

technological mediation, aligning with the author's study's noted limitation of underemphasizing structural dynamics.

The findings of this study affirm the robustness of Erving Goffman's theories in elucidating the intricacies of social interactions, particularly through his dramaturgical and frame analysis frameworks. These concepts effectively capture the performative and constructed nature of social reality, illuminating how individuals navigate roles and stigmas in both physical and digital contexts. Goffman's micro-sociological focus may underemphasize structural constraints, as highlighted by Tom Burns (1991), who notes that institutional power often overshadows individual agency. This critique aligns with macro-theories, such as those of Marx or Parsons, which prioritize systemic forces over interpersonal dynamics.

Compared to other sociologists, Goffman's work complements and contrasts with their work. His humane approach humanizes Marx's economic determinism by emphasizing micro-level strategies, such as impression management. At the same time, his frame analysis enriches Weber's interpretive sociology by grounding meaning-making in everyday encounters (Scheff, 2006). Unlike Parsons' abstract functionalism (Parsons, 1964) or Luhmann's systems theory (Luhmann, 1996), Goffman's theories offer a tangible lens for understanding lived experiences. However, they lack the broad systemic scope of these macro-perspectives.

The study's limitations include its reliance on qualitative synthesis, which restricts empirical generalizability (Goffman, 1969). The absence of quantitative data or cross-cultural comparisons limits the ability to test Goffman's concepts in diverse settings.

Conclusion

Erving Goffman's sociological legacy lies in his ability to illuminate the microdynamics of social life while addressing its broader implications for societal structures. His dramaturgical perspective reveals the performative nature of human interactions, where individuals navigate social roles to manage impressions and maintain social order. His frame analysis provides a powerful tool for understanding how social realities are constructed and manipulated, from everyday encounters to large-scale political movements. Additionally, his work on stigmatization highlights the mechanisms of social control and the resilience of marginalized groups in challenging oppressive norms.

This study demonstrates the enduring relevance of Goffman's theories in analyzing contemporary social phenomena. In digital spaces, his concepts of impression management and frame construction offer insights into how individuals and institutions shape virtual interactions. In the context of identity politics, his work on stigma and social roles provides a framework for understanding resistance and empowerment. Moreover, his micro-macro linkages underscore the interconnectedness of individual actions and societal structures, offering a holistic approach to sociological inquiry.

Future research could explore how Erving Goffman's theories apply to emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, which further complicate the boundaries between performance, identity, and reality. Additionally, cross-cultural studies could examine how frames and social roles vary across different global contexts, thereby enriching the understanding of Goffman's universal applicability. By continuing to engage with Goffman's ideas, sociologists can better navigate the complexities of modern social life. Ensuring Goffman's legacy remains a cornerstone of the discipline. Future research could address these gaps by incorporating mixed-methods approaches or exploring how frames and roles vary across different global contexts. Despite these constraints, Goffman's frameworks remain indispensable for analyzing contemporary social phenomena, as they bridge individual agency and societal structures with unparalleled depth and insight.

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DLOUHODOBÉ DĚDICTVÍ ERVINA GOFFMANA VE STUDIÍCH SOCIÁLNÍCH INTERAKCÍ

Erving Goffman (1922–1982) významně formoval moderní sociologii svými příspěvky do mikro-sociologie, zejména svými teoriemi symbolického interakcionismu a dramaturgickou analýzou. Tento článek zkoumá Goffmanovy teoretické rámce se zvláštním důrazem na jeho dramaturgickou analýzu, která přirovnává sociální interakce k divadelním představením, a jeho rámcovou analýzu, která zkoumá, jak jednotlivci konstruují a interpretují sociální realitu. Výzkum je založen na kvalitativní analýze a klíčových odborných interpretacích (komparativní, textové a konceptuální). Goffmanova práce čerpající z Chicago School of Sociology integruje poznatky Maxe Webera a George Herberta Meada s cílem analyzovat, jak jednotlivci procházejí sociálními rolemi, stigmaty a institucionálními strukturami.

DAS LANGJÄHRIGE ERBE VON ERVIN GOFFMAN IN STUDIEN ZU SOZIALEN INTERAKTIONEN

Erving Goffman (1922–1982) hat die moderne Soziologie durch seine Beiträge zur Mikrosoziologie, insbesondere durch seine Theorien des symbolischen Interaktionismus und der dramaturgischen Analyse, maßgeblich geprägt. Dieser Artikel untersucht Goffmans theoretische Rahmenkonzepte mit besonderem Schwerpunkt auf seiner dramaturgischen Analyse, die soziale Interaktionen mit Theateraufführungen vergleicht, und seiner Rahmenanalyse, die untersucht, wie Individuen soziale Realität konstruieren und interpretieren. Die Untersuchung basiert auf einer qualitativen Analyse und wichtigen fachlichen Interpretationen (vergleichend, textuell und konzeptionell). Goffmans Arbeit, die sich auf die Chicago School of Sociology stützt, integriert die Erkenntnisse von Max Weber und George Herbert Mead, um zu analysieren, wie Individuen soziale Rollen, Stigmata und institutionelle Strukturen durchlaufen.

TRWAŁE DZIEDZICTWO ERVINGA GOFFMANA W BADANIACH INTERAKCJI SPOŁECZNYCH

Erving Goffman (1922–1982) w znacznym stopniu ukształtował współczesną socjologię dzięki swojemu wkładowi w mikrosocjologię, a w szczególności dzięki teoriom interakcjonizmu symbolicznego oraz analizie dramaturgicznej. Niniejszy artykuł bada ramy teoretyczne Goffmana, kładąc nacisk na jego analizę dramaturgiczną, która przyrównuje interakcje społeczne do spektakli teatralnych, oraz na jego analizę ramową, badającą sposób, w jaki jednostki konstruują i interpretują rzeczywistość społeczną. Badania oparto na analizie jakościowej oraz kluczowych interpretacjach naukowych (analizy porównawcze, tekstualne i konceptualne). Czerpiąc z dorobku Chicago School of Sociology, praca Goffmana integruje koncepcje Maxa Webera i George'a Herberta Meada, aby analizować, w jaki sposób jednostki przechodzą przez role społeczne, stygmaty i struktury instytucjonalne.