

Reading Goffman “Forward”

In Chapter 2, we conducted a so-called “backward” reading of Goffman and attempted to outline the origins of his microsociological thinking in variety of intellectual perspectives and theoretical traditions. In this chapter, we shall try to read him “forward,” as it were, and thus try to identify how elements of his work have inspired other sociological thinkers and are employed as building blocks in contemporary social and sociological theory. Besides recording some of the most significant sociological analyses in the field of everyday, modern life, Goffman’s publications have, indisputably, left distinct imprints in contemporary sociological theory. Not only has Goffman’s authorship acted as inspiration or a dialogue partner to some of today’s most distinguished sociological theory builders, his sociology has also acted as a launch pad for what has grown to become a large number of empirically oriented studies of individuals in different social situations and contexts. In the following, we shall consider the links and inspiration from Goffman to a number of central sociologists who have used or related to his conceptual framework in their own, original theory construction. As Goffman has been influential to many sociological thinkers, our listing here of theorists with a Goffmanian flavor is not, of course, an exhaustive one. We have selected a sample of well-known sociologists on whom Goffman’s ideas have had significant influence. These are Harold Garfinkel and his ethnomethodological position, Jürgen Habermas and his theory on communicative action, Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory, Pierre Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology, and Anthony Giddens and his theory of structuration. We conclude by touching briefly upon some of the recent theoretical innovations building on Goffman’s microsociology.

Harold Garfinkel

Goffman turned his back on American sociologist Harold Garfinkel's program of ethnomethodology, which, according to Goffman, was far too oriented toward theoretical problem matters, far too radical in its epistemological implications and conclusions (Collins, 1985, p. 225), and too individualistic in its conception that everything social is locally founded. Garfinkel (1967) did, however, develop his ethnomethodology during more or less the same period as Goffman launched his sociology, and in spite of their mutual disagreements, they allegedly also inspired one another. At any rate, it is a fact that Goffman refers to Garfinkel. For example, this is evident in *Asylums* (1961) and particularly in the analysis of the moral career of the mental patient, where Goffman draws on Garfinkel's (1956) concept of degradation ceremonies (Goffman, 1961, p. 130). Both represent a microoriented everyday-life sociology dealing with the ways in which people, in order to make everyday social meetings successful, employ special competencies and draw on a special tacit and congenial knowledge stock. Another common feature, which they both probably derive from pragmatism, is the conception of the social order as a practical result of human action. Goffman is indeed, from time to time, presented as an actual forerunner of many of the ideas later developed by ethnomethodology (Attewell, 1974). For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that Goffman did in fact encourage his students to read texts by Garfinkel, with the result that a number of these students left the University of Berkeley, where Goffman was working, for Los Angeles in order to attend Garfinkel's lectures and sociological experiments (Wallace & Wolf, 1999, p. 227).

With his so-called breaching experiments, Garfinkel was interested in illustrating what happens when the normative obligations of interaction are broken and the social order collapses momentarily. According to Garfinkel, individuals interact to define the situation, and Garfinkel is interested in these everyday methods and procedures used by the participants in these meaning-creating definition processes. This is where Garfinkel differs from Goffman, who was indeed interested in the meaning-creating procedures of the actors, but on the basis of a far more normative and less cognitive interest than Garfinkel (Album, 1995, p. 252). It might be claimed that whereas Garfinkel was interested in the *microtechnique* used by individuals in order to create meaning in social situations and constitute the basis of social order, Goffman was more involved in studying the way in which individuals in social interaction live in accordance with ritual obligations, and how, in this way, they are controlled by an external, superindividual social syntax (Knorr-Cetina, 1981, p. 3). Both were preoccupied with rules, but whereas

in Goffman’s view, rules expressed moral and normative demands on the actors, to Garfinkel they were merely practical tools that, when applied, will ensure the mutual understanding of participants. Or in other words: both Goffman and Garfinkel were interested in individuals in face-to-face situations, but whereas Garfinkel was mostly interested in the way the situation is determined and defined, Goffman was, in addition to this, also preoccupied with the ways individuals work out how to behave appropriately in the situation (Album, 1995, p. 253).

Hence, it is to a large extent in their view of the social actor and in their assessment of the normative element of interaction that Garfinkel and Goffman differ from one another. Whereas Garfinkel held the opinion that in Goffman the individual is reduced to a “cultural dope,” a passive being who complies mechanically with rules and regulations, Goffman held the view that ethnomethodologists isolated themselves in a mystifying perspective detached from reality. It seems only fair to mention, however, that even though Goffman dissociated himself from ethnomethodology (particularly its exaggerated pragmatism, which refers everything to collective social pragmatics), his own authorship took a clear ethnomethodological turn with the publication of *Forms of Talk* (1981a). Here Goffman writes himself into the strand of ethnomethodology that is termed “conversation analysis.”

Anthony Giddens

One of the examples of where Goffman’s sociology has been employed in a more substantive theoretical manner is in British sociologist Anthony Giddens’s development of his theory of structuration. Thus, in *The Constitution of Society* (1984), Giddens draws to a large extent on Goffman’s analyses of interaction among copresent individuals. Giddens’s ambition is to formulate a general social theory or an *approach*, as he calls it, that does not conceive the reproduction of society from either an actor-oriented action perspective or from a structuralist systems perspective but accepts that both these aspects are inextricably linked. Giddens highlights many of Goffman’s concepts of the units of interaction order (gatherings, events, unfocused interaction, focused interaction, and encounters) as important building blocks in a general social theory, and he also claims that in Goffman’s works we find important inspiration for the understanding of the role the *practical consciousness* of individuals plays in everyday life.

Giddens draws attention to Goffman, because he has demonstrated how individuals are equipped with a keen practical consciousness and that this very practical consciousness helps us make everyday interaction successful

and unproblematic. As Giddens points out, with his analyses, Goffman shows how, in everyday life, we draw on a large amount of internalized tacit knowledge, which provides everyday encounters with the quality of regularity and ritual. Therefore, according to Giddens, understanding this practical consciousness is an absolute must for a sociology that wishes to explain the reproduction of society and, at the same time, to bridge the gap in the dichotomic relationship between structure and actor. Drawing clearly on the works of Goffman, Giddens states:

I think it highly important to emphasize the fact that encounters typically occur as routines. That is, what from the angle of the fleeting moment might appear brief and trivial interchanges take on much more substance when seen as inherent in the iterative nature of social life. The routinization of encounters is of major significance in binding the fleeting encounter to social reproduction and thus to the seeming “fixity” of institutions. (Giddens, 1984, p. 72)

It appears that Giddens borrows from Goffman, among others, knowledge about the practical consciousness (and the social significance of the body) of individuals for a theory that is intended to explain the preservation of social life without ending up in either structuralist determinism or voluntarism. According to Giddens, Goffman and ethnomethodologists have demonstrated how individuals in everyday life make use of rules and knowledge to ensure what he calls “social integration.” In his so-called *structuration theory*, Giddens uses the concepts of system integration and social integration to describe the fact that both social systems and individuals in face-to-face interactions may generate types of social order and integration, and here Giddens draws on Goffman to show how individuals with a certain practical consciousness produce and maintain a more or less stable social order through a seriality of interchanges. According to Giddens, Goffman has been criticized for taking the motivation of actors for granted and for presupposing a cynical and voluntaristic actor, who adapts and adjusts to the given situation on the basis of egocentric motives. Goffman may certainly be interpreted in a voluntaristic direction, but such interpretation disregards, as we have established and as is also pointed out by Giddens, that Goffman emphasized the tactfulness displayed in social encounters and the solicitude felt by individuals on behalf of the situation and the participating parties. So what Giddens points out is that not only did Goffman practice microsociology, in actual fact he displayed an interest in the innermost mechanics of social reproduction (Giddens, 1984, p. 70). In other words, Giddens argues that a nuanced understanding of human behavior in face-to-face situations is an essential element of a social theory that intends to explain how society is reproduced.

Drawing on Goffman, Giddens also explores the nature of the practical consciousness that makes life predictable in the sense that it becomes comprehensible and nonchaotic. At the same time, Goffman and the ethnomethodologists are employed to display that everyday routines are not fixed and absolute entities that are unconsciously repeated but rather the subjects of a constant, diligent, and reflexive adaptation effort (Giddens, 1984, p. 86). In other words, the (inter)action processes of individuals may very well be governed by routines, but these “constraining elements” are to a large extent the more or less conscious results of exchanging processes between practically conscious actors, processes that are constantly being changed and developed. In his formulation of the concept “ontological security,” Giddens also draws on Goffman. His point of departure is Erik Erikson’s developmental psychology, but Goffman’s concept of frame is also included, since, according to Giddens, “framing may be regarded as providing the ordering of activities and meanings whereby ontological security is sustained in the enactment of daily routines” (Giddens, 1984, p. 87). Frames, thus, constitute the tools actors use to understand and create meaning in their social surroundings, and thus they help them to ensure the sense of predictability and security necessary to maintain the self.

Jürgen Habermas

Another central contemporary sociologist who makes use of concepts and theoretical insights from Goffman is German sociologist Jürgen Habermas. In his analysis of legitimacy problems in late capitalism (*Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus*), which was published in 1973, he employed the concept of total institution (albeit without referring to Goffman) to describe the social organizational principles characterizing primitive societies. But it was not until the publication of his influential work *Theory of Communicative Action* that Habermas in an integrated way explicitly referred to elements of Goffman’s thinking. He did so mainly in his discussion of four different action concepts (theological, normatively regulated, dramaturgical, and communicative). With regard to his formulation of dramaturgical action, Habermas refers explicitly to Goffman’s work:

From the perspective of dramaturgical actions we understand social action as an encounter in which participants form a visible public for each other and perform for one another. “Encounter” and “performance” are the key concepts. The performance of a troupe before the eye of third persons is only a special case. A performance enables the actor to present himself to his audience in a certain way; in bringing something of his subjectivity to appearance, he would like to be seen by his public in a particular way. (Habermas, 1984, p. 90)

In this way, Goffman's investigation of dramaturgical action is included in major theoretical construction work concerned with the development of a special communicative rationality that may serve as a tool for the establishment of norms. This integration is quite natural, considering the fact that Habermas and Goffman actually share a common interest in the communicative interactions of individuals. Habermas does, however, present a somewhat one-sided reading of Goffman's dramaturgical model, as he seems to overaccentuate the element of information manipulation and cynicism identified by Goffman in the role-playing actor. Thus, when Habermas (1984, p. 93) states that "Goffman's model of action does not provide for his behaving toward the social world in a norm-conformative attitude," he seems to neglect an important dimension of Goffman's work. Not only does Goffman demonstrate in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (which is the only one of Goffman's publications Habermas explicitly draws on) that the role-playing individual does indeed have a moral side and that interaction is indeed concerned with collaboration, but later on, in *Interaction Ritual*, he also points out that our everyday interactions are successful and do not break down in situations because we live by and comply with certain ceremonial and thus normative rules, as we illustrated in Chapter 4. Such reading of Goffman as seen in Habermas has, indeed, caused Goffman interpreters to react. Thus, James Chriss (1995b, p. 562) stated that "what Habermas and other astute social thinkers have failed to understand clearly is that, although all deceptive presentations are staged, not all staged presentations are deceptive or geared toward obfuscation or distortion."

Niklas Luhmann

Earlier, we mentioned Anthony Giddens as one of the sociologists who draws substantially on Goffman. German sociologist Niklas Luhmann is another. In *Trust and Power*, which is the forerunner of a number of subsequent substantial books on systems theory and constitutes Luhmann's attempt at illustrating how such phenomena as "trust" and "confidence" are manifest in differentiated and complex societies, there are numerous examples of his direct indebtedness to Goffman's sociology, while Parsons and Husserl also supply substance to the creation, application, and analysis of concepts (Luhmann, 1979). For the main part, Goffman's contribution here is the minute and detailed analyses and examples of the ways individuals assist one another to maintain face and help one another keep interaction going. Here trust is essential if interaction is not going to collapse. In Luhmann, this interactional trust is split up into *personal trust* and *trust in*

systems, respectively. Personal trust can be taken as whether individuals seem confidence inspiring and trustworthy. In Luhmann, this trust is, to a large extent, based on whether individuals are successful in their self-presentation. It appears from the quotation below that Luhmann’s conception of self-presentation draws on Goffman’s thinking:

People and social systems strive, in their self-presentation as we have already shown, to draw a consistent picture of themselves and make it socially accepted. Since other people and social systems also have an interest in building up reliable expectations with regard to the people around them, in seeing them as persisting identities, there develops in social interaction a type of expressive language which enables actions to be attributed to people or social systems, and not only causally, indeed, but also symbolically, as expressing their essence, their self. (Luhmann, 1979, p. 82)

Thus, according to Luhmann, it is trust, both the personal and that displayed in abstract systems, that contributes to reducing complexity in society. Furthermore, Luhmann utilizes Goffman’s thinking on mistrust and deception displayed in *Strategic Interaction*. It may be stated, then, that Goffman legitimizes central elements in Luhmann’s discussion of trust by providing sociological substance to the micro level in the analysis of the necessity of trust for all types of social systems, and Luhmann draws broadly on a large number of Goffman’s works.

In Luhmann’s extensive systems-theoretical work, *Social Systems* (1995), Goffman’s thinking is also present. Here, Luhmann’s mission is quite different, as this is where the more abstract thoughts on autopoiesis, observation, and communication strings dominate and must create the basis of a general sociology that can relate to and analyze all imaginable social contexts. Here, a strong parallelism exists between Goffman’s idea of interaction order and Luhmann’s concept of interaction systems as a particular type of social system. Goffman also plays a certain role in Luhmann’s formulation of the concepts of “inclusion” and “exclusion,” since here, Luhmann refers directly to Goffman’s concept of total institutions. According to Luhmann, in stratified societies, total institutions play the role of including individuals who have been excluded by society (Mortensen, 2000, p. 98). Goffman is also incorporated, albeit briefly, in connection with Luhmann’s idea that an action is always an action open to the perception of others, an action “for you,” “against you,” or “in front of you” (Luhmann, 1995, p. 130). Finally, it should be mentioned that in *The Reality of the Mass Media*, Luhmann draws on Goffman’s concepts of objects and frames, and, initially, Luhmann makes use of the game metaphor with a view to understanding entertainment.

It may be added that the connection between Goffman and Luhmann is quite obvious. Both are deeply interested in communication: Goffman in communication processes that create and maintain the selves of individuals, Luhmann in communication processes in different types of systems. Finally, it may be said that to a certain extent, Luhmann carries on one of the analyses Goffman embarked upon: the coupling between the macro level of society and mundane everyday interactions (Luhmann, 1995, chapter 10). Moreover, examining the Goffman–Luhmann relationship, it is a noteworthy coincidence that Goffman’s somewhat vague conceptualization of the relationship between the interaction order and societal structures did in fact have clear systems-theoretical features. As we saw in Chapter 4, Goffman used the term “loose coupling,” which may indicate some level of systems-theoretical inspiration (most likely found in the works of Gregory Bateson, who also happened to inspire Luhmann).

Pierre Bourdieu

Although it has only been sporadically examined, there was a professional connection between the work of Goffman and that of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In fact, it was Bourdieu who introduced Goffman in France through his editing of all five French translations of Goffman’s books, and together, Bourdieu and Goffman had planned a joint presentation at the American Sociological Association’s annual conference in 1982, which was, however, obstructed by Goffman’s stomach cancer (Winkin, 1983, p. 109). Thus, Bourdieu had great respect for Goffman and his contributions to sociology, and Bourdieu’s subtle sensation of the duality in the *social game*—that on the one hand individuals seek to advance and achieve advantages within different fields of social competition through adaptation to the rules of the game in that field (thus developing a particular habitus), thus, at the same time, reproducing and cementing the social order—contains clear parallels to Goffman. In an article published immediately after Goffman’s death, Bourdieu paid tribute to him by writing,

This vision of the social world, which may have appeared pessimistic, was that of a warm, friendly, modest, considerate man who was perhaps made the more sensitive to the theatricality of social life by his own profound impatience with all the ordinary forms of academic ceremonial and intellectual pomp. (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 113)

Bourdieu’s positive assessment of Goffman’s work and perspective was, however, not unambiguous. While acknowledging and appreciating the

empirical sensitivity and the urge to conduct direct observations of the social world, Bourdieu expressed reservations regarding the interactionist tradition of which Goffman was seen as a leading exponent. Thus, in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, which was coauthored with Loïc Wacquant, Bourdieu expressed skepticism toward interactionist epistemology, as it, in Bourdieu’s words, involves a certain blindness to objective and macro-level power structures (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). According to Bourdieu, Goffman and interactionist sociology fail to grasp important societal power dimensions such as the “symbolic violence” that may be embedded in the language or in the actual structuring of interaction. According to Bourdieu, individuals move about between different “fields,” bringing their own “habitus,” which is shaped by the surrounding social space, their concrete position in the field in question, and their amount of “capital.” Thus, habitus is the embodiment of historically produced and reproduced patterns of relations between these social trajectories, which provide individuals with certain dispositions for action that are expressed in social interactions. In other words, according to Bourdieu, the interaction and dispositions of individuals are predominantly expressions of the structure of society. To Goffman, on the other hand, it is in the *actual* interaction, in the concrete meeting between individuals, that the social aspect is unfolded—almost without past history or sequel. Whereas Bourdieu postulated a presituational shaping and definition of human encounters, Goffman was instead oriented toward the immediacy and unconditionality of the situation, and the former is therefore more structuralistic, whereas the latter represents a distinctly interactionist perspective. According to Goffman (1983a, p. 11), there is a “‘loose coupling’ between interactional practices and societal structures,” whereas in Bourdieu, these structures are embedded in the minds of individuals and their actions through habitus. In one of his latest books, *Masculine Domination* (1998), Bourdieu did at times draw directly on some of the insights pioneered by Goffman and others. As its title indicates, the book describes how the structures that cause one gender to dominate the other are apparently reproduced in our society and come to shape our consciousness, acts, and discourses. Here Goffman’s theory on gender relations—which we dealt with in Chapter 7—is brought into play, and on a couple of occasions Bourdieu mentions how the thinking behind “the ritualization of femininity” (Goffman, 1977c) may be used to elucidate some of the gender-based disparities in modern society. According to Bourdieu, these disparities are social constructions describing men as protectors and supervisors and women as delicate and submissive creatures (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 86). In other words, this is not a question of difference in habitus as

such, but rather of differences in the “gender schemata” that have developed historically from different societal institutions such as family, church, state, school, and so forth.

The Sociology of Emotions

As we suggested in Chapter 4, much of Goffman’s work was pioneering in integrating feelings into sociological theory, and it is evident that his work on the interactional dynamics and social function of emotions has opened a door to a sociological subfield: the sociology of emotion counting. Goffman’s dramaturgy as well as his writings on social ritualization explore how the management of feelings of embarrassment and shame constitutes an integral part of individuals’ everyday-life interaction. Building on these insights, sociological scholars such as Thomas J. Scheff, Randall Collins, and Arlie R. Hochschild have advanced and expanded Goffman’s thoughts into a new sociological subdiscipline focusing, among other things, on emotion management. Reading Goffman as a symbolic interactionist in the Cooley line, Scheff (2005) has directed attention to two central aspects of his work: (1) the analysis of the process of living in the minds of others (shared awareness) and (2) how this process produces emotion. As pointed out by Scheff, the individual in much of Goffman’s work is constantly attentive and responsive to his own standing in the eyes of others, implying more or less constant states of emotion such as embarrassment. Individuals in everyday life interaction are concerned not to lose face or to end up with a discredited self and thus with feelings of embarrassment. Early interactionists like Cooley acknowledged this, but according to Scheff, Goffman went beyond Cooley and explored how individuals manage the emotions related to this process:

Although Goffman has nothing to say about the pride option, his examples suggest that actors usually do not accept shame/embarrassment passively. Instead they try to manage it, by avoidance, if possible. Most of the embarrassment/shame possibilities that Goffman’s examples explore are not about the actual occurrence of emotions but anticipations and management based on these anticipations. (Scheff, 2005, p. 159)

In Scheff’s view, individuals’ management of emotion serves a crucial function in terms of sustaining social order. Scheff (1990, 2006) proposes that maintaining social bonds through *bond work* is an essential human activity. In everyday life, individuals make efforts to maintain normal social bonds through recognition and ratification of each other’s faces. As lack of

recognition may result in feelings of exclusion and embarrassment, such emotions should be considered important drivers toward conforming to social norms and situational standards.

In another vein, Arlie R. Hochschild’s (1979, 1983) works on emotion management are heavily indebted to—but also critical of—Goffman. According to Hochschild, most of Goffman’s analyses focus on what she calls *surface acting*, that is, the kind of acting that is performed before an audience, implying that the performer acts for the benefit of the audience. Surface acting thus involves the management and control of (emotional) expressions in social situations, but this management, Hochschild argues, does not go below the surface of the individual. In Hochschild’s view, then, Goffman did not concern himself with the ways that individuals actually control their feelings and how social situations constrain this feeling control. Addressing this alleged shortcoming in Goffman’s work, Hochschild proposes the term *deep acting* for describing the process by which individuals control or induce feelings in themselves and act according to these feelings. In this view, individuals may manipulate their own emotions in order to act “authentically” in social situations. This is, however, not entirely an internal project, as individuals’ emotions must be aligned with the social norms and conventions applying to the social situation. Hochschild (1983) termed these situational emotional scripts *feeling rules*, as they induce a sense of obligation that guides the emotion work. Moreover, Hochschild has followed Goffman’s ideas on interactional power asymmetries in exploring how considerations of feelings are unequally distributed in society, as people of lower social status are often expected to manage their emotions, especially in their contacts with people of higher status. And what is more, she has shown how such asymmetries are often integrated parts of jobs in the service industry:

When rules about how to feel and to express feelings are set by management, when workers have weaker rights to courtesy than customers do, when deep and surface acting are forms of labor to be sold, and when private capacities for empathy and warmth are put to corporate uses, what happens to the way a person relates to her feelings or to her face? When worked-up warmth becomes an instrument of service work, what can a person learn about herself from her feelings? (Hochschild, 1983, p. 89)

Expanding on Goffman’s ideas, Hochschild thus demonstrates how feelings and emotions may be commercialized and sold as commodities and how such use of feelings reflects societal hierarchies and places the heaviest burdens of emotion work on people in subordinate positions.

Conclusion

Concluding this chapter, it can be said that key themes and insights from Erving Goffman's work have inspired a number of social thinkers and sociological theory builders. Goffman's sociological legacy is thus revitalized and cultivated by prominent members of the social science community, of which a selection have been brushed over in this chapter. Goffman himself lived long enough to witness how several of his students, including Harvey Sacks and Emmanuel Schegloff from the time at Berkeley, earned international acclaim (Collins, 1985, p. 216), while a number of other Goffman-inspired theory constructions have been published since his death in 1982. A clear strand of Goffmanian thought is found in the works of another Goffman student, Randall Collins, who most evidently illustrated his indebtedness to Goffman in his works on emotions and social stratification (Collins, 1990) and in his theory of so-called interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004). In the latter, which may indeed be regarded as a contribution to a ritual theory within the "sociology of emotions" (Summers-Effler, 2007), Collins draws extensively on Goffman's (and Durkheim's) conception of ritual in building his theory of "momentary encounters among human bodies charged up with emotions and consciousness because they have gone through chains of previous encounters" (Collins, 2004, p. 3). Adopting from Goffman a focus on moments (situations) rather than their men, Collins advances a theory of interaction rituals that makes visible the conditions that determine the things that happen in social situations (Collins, 2004, p. 9). Collins's theory of interaction ritual chains is a theory of social dynamics. Its central mechanism is that in social occasions with high levels of intersubjectivity, emotional entrainment produces emotional energy, and in some of these moments (those with a high degree of ritual intensity), old social structures are torn up while new ones come into shape (Collins, 2004, p. 42).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that although critically assessing some of Goffman's fundamental constructs (that we are emotional creatures seeking recognition in interpersonal encounters), another contemporary sociological theorist, Jonathan H. Turner (2002), adopts several constructs from Goffman's microsociology in exploring the embeddedness of social interaction in the development of his sociological theory of interpersonal behavior. Turner's main ambition in this work is to present a grand theory of the microdynamics of interpersonal behavior, and in pursuing this task, he builds a conceptual base founded on the works of George Herbert Mead, Sigmund Freud, Alfred Schutz, Émile Durkheim, and Goffman. Turner's first step in unfolding his theory is an exploration of the sociocultural embeddedness of human interaction. According to Turner, sociologists have yet not

“adequately conceptualized the structures and cultural systems in which encounters are embedded” (Turner, 2002, p. 27), and in addressing this issue, Turner conceptualizes the dynamics of sociocultural embeddedness by elaborating on Goffman’s model of social interaction. Thus, he adopts from Goffman the conception that human encounters are lodged in various institutional systems and domains, each of which contain structures and cultures that impose themselves on human interactions. By way of Goffman, then, Turner develops the idea of “normatizing of encounters,” which denotes “the point at which cultural systems impose constraints on the symbolic dynamics of the encounter” (Turner, 2002, p. 47).

Closing up, it needs mentioning that Goffman’s intellectual influence is also apparent in a multitude of empirical studies. Goffmanian concepts and perspectives are applied in analyses of the protests of the underprivileged against unreasonable working and living conditions in India (Oommen, 1990), the identity formation of American baseball players (Adler & Adler, 1989), the orchestration of funeral ceremonies (Turner & Edgley, 1976), interaction rituals and etiquette among cancer patients in a Norwegian hospital ward (Album, 1996), and desexualization of the female body in connection with pelvic examination (Henslin & Biggs, 1978), to mention but a few.

Questions

- In what way is contemporary sociology particularly indebted to the works of Erving Goffman?
- How is Erving Goffman’s sociology similar to and different from the various types of sociology of emotions in contemporary sociology?
- What kinds of theoretical issues and empirical issues may benefit from Erving Goffman’s perspective?