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Q1(c)

How does the dramaturgical perspective enable our understanding of everyday life?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- How does the dramaturgical perspective enable our understanding of everyday life?
- Keep the answer within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Goffman reads everyday life as performance with front and back regions, teams, and **face-work**.

The point is the shared **definition of the situation**, not a claim that all talk is false.

Mead's Me is made public on this stage.

Asylums shows what happens when the back region is removed.

The method is strong on encounters and weak as a full theory of class and the state.

Introduction

Erving Goffman treated everyday life as a set of performances in which people present a self before others. The dramaturgical perspective does not say that people are dishonest. It says that interaction needs staging, teams, and repair if a shared **definition of the situation** is to hold.

Body

Core tools

- In **The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life**, Goffman distinguished a front region, where the official performance runs, from a back region, where the team drops the script.
- Props, dress, setting, and manner are the equipment of the performance, as in a clinic, a classroom, or a shop floor.
- Impression management is the work of controlling what others can see. **Face-work** repairs slips so that embarrassment does not destroy the encounter.
- Teams collude to keep a **definition of the situation**, which is why a waiter and a cook may speak one language in the kitchen and another in the dining room.

Link to the self and to structure

- George Herbert Mead had already split the I and the Me. Goffman shows how the Me is staged in public, not only internalised as a generalised other.

- The perspective makes visible the labour of courtesy, deference, and stigma that surveys of attitude miss.
- **Total institutions in Asylums show what happens when the back region is seized:** the inmate cannot manage a separate self.

Everyday life it clarifies

- Office meetings, hospital rounds, and online profiles are front-stage work with curated biographies.
- Domestic workers and nurses do emotion work that Arlie Hochschild later named, which Goffman's stage already prepared.
- Indian examples include the carefully managed public honour of a wedding, and the different speech used with an official and with kin.
- The limit is that dramaturgy explains the encounter better than it explains class or state power. **Marx** and **Weber** still supply the larger map.

Flow diagram

Goffman dramaturgy -> Front region
 Goffman dramaturgy -> Back region
 Front region -> Impression management
 Back region -> Impression management
 Mead Impression management and Me -> Self in interaction
 Impression management -> Self in interaction

Conclusion

Dramaturgy enables the study of everyday life by treating interaction as staged work with fronts, backs, teams, and repair. It joins Mead's self to public performance and makes courtesy and stigma researchable. It does not replace class analysis. It shows how unequal people still have to act together in the same room.

Facts & figures

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life

Goffman's 1959 book that set out front, back, teams, and impression management.

Face-work

Repair of slips so that embarrassment does not destroy the encounter.

Total institution

Goffman's term in Asylums for settings that strip the inmate of a separate back region.

Mead's I and Me

The impulsive I and the social Me; dramaturgy shows how the Me is performed.

Definition of the situation

The working agreement among participants about what is going on in an encounter.

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