

"Impression Management"

## Class Notes

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The definition of the situation is a process that occurs in interaction, that all participants engage in. We like to exert some control over the outcome. To aid in defining the situation, we often use impression management tactics. These tactics are self-presentation techniques individuals use to manipulate the impressions formed by others.

There are three types of selves people try to give off using self-presentation techniques

1. **Authentic self**- an image of ourselves that is consistent with the way we view ourselves (our real self)
2. **Ideal self**- a public image of ourselves that is consistent with the way that we wish we were (our ideal self)
3. **Tactical self**- a public image that is positive and favorable-- whether it is authentic or ideal-- usually we do this by claiming to have attributes consistent with what others want us to be.

## Self-Presentation Techniques

### Course Contents

[Introduction to Social Psychology Home](#)

[About Professor Collett](#)

[Syllabus](#)

[Calendar and Readings](#)

[Lectures and Materials](#)

1. **Self-disclosure**- where you disclose information about yourself as a means to claim an authentic identity
2. **Managing Appearances**- where you manage your appearance to be perceived a given way. This is more tactical, to present a somewhat false, exaggerated, or leading image. There are many ways this can take place
  - I. *Physical Appearance and Props* - example: if you want to appear intelligent, you might put on glasses (which is a prop); if you want to appear like a professional, you may put on a suit and carry a briefcase, even if the briefcase is empty
  - II. *Emotional Expression* - example: if you work in a service industry (such as in retail or at a restaurant), even if you may be upset you need to manage your emotions. You appear happy or at least content when dealing with the customers to attempt to seem happy to be helping them.
  - III. *Associates* - example: If I were trying to impress someone, I might mention that I had dinner with Barack Obama before he became a Senator. I'm managing the others people may associate me with.
  - IV. *Regions*
    - i. Front stage- as in drama, the front stage is where the performing takes place
    - ii. Back stage- the backstage is where preparation occurs.
    - iii. example: my bedroom (backstage,) may be messy

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and disorganized, but my living room (front stage) is clean and organized in case people come to visit

### 3. Ingratiation

- I. *Opinion Conformity*- where you align your opinion with that of the people who you are ingratiating yourself to (Saying, "Oh, you liked *The Great Gatsby*? Me too!" even if you haven't read it or didn't enjoy it)
  - II. *Other enhancement*- saying good things about other person (Oh, that scarf is so beautiful! Where did you get it? You have such great taste!)
  - III. *Selective self-presentation*- selectively showing part of the reality to give a certain impression
    - I. *Self-enhancement*- Giving the story a positive spin- Saying "My volleyball team won third place in the tournament this weekend," failing to mention that there were only four teams. It sounds better to say that you got third place allowing the listeners to assume it was a large tournament.
    - II. *Self-deprecation*- Giving the story a negative spin
  - IV. *Playing Dumb* - intentionally acting less intelligent to lift up the ego of the other person in interaction
    - i. Women often play dumb to men
    - ii. Men play dumb with superiors
4. **Aligning Actions**- attempts to define apparently questionable conduct as actually in line with cultural norms
- I. *Disclaimers*- made in anticipation of impending actions ("I didn't get a lot of sleep last night, so I'm not on top of my game today.")
  - II. *Accounts*- made to mitigate responsibility after they have performed acts that threaten their social identities, made after the act took place ("Janice and I haven't practiced much lately because she's been sick.")
5. **Alter-Casting**- imposing roles or identities ("casting") on another ("alter")
- I. Example: A parent talking to a child, "I know you are going to act like a big boy today and sit quietly!" assigning the role of "big boy" to the child.

## Activity

While watching the *Sex in the City* episode, "The Drought," look at the ways in which the characters use self-presentation techniques. Write down five distinct examples using at least two different characters. For more information, see Collett, Jessica L. 2007. "Goffman in Bed." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 70:4.



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