The Mortification of Self

- Inmates lose their civilian clothes and rights, they have limited privacy and they are forced to endure ‘batch living’.
- Personal territories are invaded, damaging personal information is publicly aired, pictures taken, hair cut, personal belongings removed.
- Inmates are disinfected of identifications and lose their identity kits
- The institution crushes any sense of self-importance.

Playing it Cool

- Inmates protect a sense of self by playing it cool - 4 adaptation strategies:
  - Situational withdrawal
  - Intransigent Line
  - Colonization
  - Conversion
- The irony is that all of these are rational attempts to preserve a sense of their own identity.

Challenging the claims of Psychiatrists?

- Goffman was extremely critical about the medical and scientific claims of psychiatrists.
- Much psychotic behaviour is demonstrated by not abiding by the rules governing everyday behaviour - if you break these rules you will risk people doubting your sanity.
- Mental illness is a collection of situational improprieties and insanity refers to a person’s behaviour and not to his or her bodily malfunctions.

More than to any family or club, more than to any class or sex, more than to any nation, the individual belongs to gatherings, and he had best show that he is a member in good standing. The ultimate penalty for breaking the rules is harsh. Just as we fill our jails with those who transgress the legal order, so we partly fill our asylums with those who act unsuitably – the first kind of institution being used to protect our lives and property; the second, to protect our gatherings and occasions.

(Goffman 1963: 248)

Criticisms of Symbolic Interactionism

- Is this really sociology?
- Are symbolic interactionists too vague?
- Sufficiently microscopic?