The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life (1959)

- Stage metaphor
  Goffman: Limits – life not always make believe/rehearsed; on stage, the self performs to characters and audience – in real life, they are one
- Individuals have the agency to project an impression of themselves, but because of the strong influence of society's norms/expectations/rules, will not go outside
- The expressiveness of an individual is due to the expression he is giving and giving off
- Individual intentionally conveys misinformation to shape impression
- E.g. two friends at lunch vs specialist and client: different impressions given off
- Those with discredited presentations will feel ill at ease, embarrassed
- Performance: “All the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants”
- Front: part of performance which plays to the audience
- Roles: taking on a role with a particular front already established – actor must both perform the given task and maintain the corresponding front. Fronts tend to be selected, not created
- The reality created by a performance is delicate and fragile – can always be shattered by minor mishaps

Erving Goffman – Fine & Smith

- Embarrassment as a major theme – what people try to avoid – fundamental significance
- People try to avoid at all costs a dashing of social expectation
- View of human nature that reduces 'character' to interactional skills
- Studies confined to interaction
- Theorist of civility and conservatism
- No attention to structure and culture?
- Even when an actor fails to act within these constraints, they do not stop existing
- Rawls: False assumption that Goffman documents the struggle between structure and agency
  Goffman's theory:
  Social self achieved by and through interaction

  Commitment to the order creates its meaning – commitment to the ground rules of interaction
  is a moral imperative
  Individual and structure are not considered by Goffman to be competing but joint products of the interaction order

- Fear of being discovered as false – assumed discrepancy between front and real self
- The character performed is a product of each interaction, but the performer is a product of all interactions
- Selves have no existence in their own right? - Rawls
- McIntyre: The self has no lines of its own, only exists in interaction
- Simon Johnson Williams: Goffman celebrates the subordination of reality to appearance
- Necessity of performance to maintain order
- Stigma, Behaviour in Public Places – focus on mood, expressions, feelings, passion
- Asylums: Impact human encounters can have on sense of self-identity
- As human beings, creatures of variable impulse – as characters, cannot be subject to ups and downs (Goffman)
- Our sense of self can arise from “little ways in which we resist the pull”
- Generally determinative influence of social orders, including public orders
- Has explored issues of gender