

Understanding Goffman's Dramaturgy through Disney's Mulan (1998)

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March 7, 2022

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Ohsfeldt, Michael. 2022. "Understanding Goffman's Dramaturgy through Disney's Mulan (1998)". *TRAILS: Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology*, March. Washington DC: American Sociological Association. <https://trails.asanet.org/article/view/understanding-goffman-through-mulan>.

Abstract

The theory of dramaturgy put forth by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* is foundational for sociological understandings of the self, interaction, identity, and roles, which continue to be relevant for students in both their academic education and their everyday lived experiences. Yet, theories are complex, providing useful tools that necessitate further explanation and training in for students to take sociology out of the classroom. This combined lesson and activity seeks to help students learn and engage with the theoretical perspective and insights of Goffman's dramaturgy through the popular Disney animated film *Mulan*. *Mulan* is a film characterized by the protagonist's dramaturgical struggle as they navigate identity, role, and gender conflicts. The film is examined through a discussion-based lesson which applies Goffman's theories in a song-by-song collaborative content analysis that involves both instructor and students. The experience provided by this theory-informed investigation of *Mulan* is then put into practice by students via an in-class activity where groups are assigned differing Disney songs to analyze and discuss. This activity enables students to practice analysis and provides a way to assess students' understanding of both theory and content analysis.

Details

Subject Areas: Cultural Sociology, Emotions, Social Psychology, Socialization, Theory

Resource Types: Class Activity, Lecture, PowerPoint, Video

Class Levels: College 200, College 300, College 400, Graduate

Class Sizes: Medium, Small

Usage Notes

This resource has been designed to reinforce and extend students' knowledge of Goffman and sociological perspectives of the self and interaction via a collaborative application of dramaturgy to a cultural text, *Mulan*, illustrating the dynamics of both the theory and film in the process. Theories can be difficult and abstract parts of learning sociology, but through experience in a guided application of theory in content analysis of a popular item of entertainment media students gain practical, enriching experience in both theory and methods. This lesson is a combination of lecture, discussion, and group activity, which will take a whole class period, lasting between 40 to 60 minutes, with 10 to 15 minutes recommended for the group activity. This lesson is intended to supplement prior teaching of dramaturgy in a course through the analysis of a specific cultural artifact. A refresher on Goffman's dramaturgy is provided which can be altered to suit class background and needs. The lesson is structured around the students having prior familiarity with the Disney animated film *Mulan* (1998), so it is recommended that they are notified of the lecture's topic and activity ahead of time so that they have time to watch the film. If possible, you may want to offer to host a screening of the film as an extra out-of-class activity to ensure that all have access to the film. This

theoretical analysis practice is intended to provoke discussion from students. Analysis of the film is provided to help the instructor guide these discussions and highlight important aspects. The group activity is designed to encourage creative applications of theory in content analysis, while also allowing the instructor to assess learning.

Learning Goals and Assessments

LEARNING GOALS

Goal 1: To illustrate Goffman's theories of dramaturgy, performance, and the presentation of the self in an engaging manner through the animated film *Mulan* (1998).

Goal 2: To connect students' understanding of sociological thought to both their own lives and the media or cultural products they encounter so that they can apply sociological perspectives of self throughout culture and society.

Goal 3: To cultivate students' theoretical, analytical, and methodological skills via exposing them to a theoretically informed content analysis and asking them to conduct one themselves.

ASSESSMENTS

Assessment 1: Students will be able to discuss and connect the events and dynamics of *Mulan* (1998) to issues of the self and its performance through the structure, arguments, and vocabulary of Goffman's theories. For example, identifying which settings, appearances, and manners are demanded by *Mulan*'s performative roles.

Assessment 2: Students will be able to analyze and convey how the presentation of self relates to emotions, identity, and gender through the application of Goffmanian theory. This lesson constantly asks students questions about specific cultural products and their responses to those prompts provide an in-progress evaluation of their ability to employ sociology.

Assessment 3: Students will be able to demonstrate their ability to apply theory in analysis of a cultural text. Students will express this capability through the group activity analysis of an assigned Disney song, indicating their ability to both perform and present the findings of a content analysis.

Resource Files

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