Understanding Goffman’s Dramaturgy through Disney’s *Mulan* (1998) – Instructions, Usage, Learning Goals

Lesson Designed by  
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* Materials Needed & Estimated Time
  + Viewing access to *Mulan* (1998)
  + Erving Goffman’s (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*
  + Time needs:
    - 40 – 60 minutes for in-class lecture, discussion, and group activity.
      * 10 – 15 minutes specifically for the group activity.
    - 88 minutes for film runtime.
      * 12 minutes specifically for musical numbers.

This lesson is recommended to supplement prior teaching of Goffman’s dramaturgy in a course by providing a way for students to get experience analyzing a specific cultural artifact using a specific theoretical framework. As such, students are suggested to have read some of Erving Goffman’s (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* beforehand (the “Introduction” and Chapter 1 “Performances,” in part or in whole, are recommended). Additionally, this lesson is structured around the students having prior familiarity with the Disney movie *Mulan* (1998), so it is heavily 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, potentially in a classroom or library room, to ensure that all have access to the film. The film can be found on physical media such as DVD or Blu-Ray, is available as part of a subscription to the streaming service Disney+, or is available as on-demand video through many sites such as Amazon. Current availability for legal streaming, renting, or buying of *Mulan* (1998) can be checked through reference to the search site *Just Watch*: <https://www.justwatch.com/us/movie/Mulan>

The film is 88 minutes in total, and while watching the full film is recommended for a fuller discussion and analysis by students, the songs total to less than 12 minutes, so, if need be, only the songs could be shown in class, or specific songs could be shown as part of the lecture to encourage deeper analysis or discussion. Where possible official Disney YouTube links have been provided to *Mulan*’s (1998) songs, and where not a time stamp has been provided so that they can be readily found within the full film.

For time management, the group activity can either be at the end of a single session or split up between class sessions, with students assigned into groups to composes responses to be shared later. The group activity responses can be shared in class at a subsequent meeting through the groups presenting their insights, or they could instead not be shared in class and rather submitted as a group in the form of a PowerPoint slide or two which the instructor could gather to either post for students or quickly show in class. Additionally, for time management, please note that this lesson while designed to cover the entire film can also be broken down into modules of fewer songs to fit the time and interests of a course. Moreover, each slide goes into extensive detail, with numerous questions about the songs. When presenting these can be trimmed for time or interest to focus on the questions or elements that the instructor finds most vital, or the students are responding to best. For questions that are not focused on in the verbal discussions you can encourage student to engage with them in their written reflections, giving them an opportunity to explore further.

* Lesson Plan
  + Goffman (1959) dramaturgy refresher.
  + Song by song Goffman-informed analysis and discussion of *Mulan* (1998).
  + Additional discussion beyond the songs.
  + Break into groups to analyze a non-*Mulan* (1998) Disney song through Goffman.
  + Students turn in reflection paper/notes.
* Courses for this Lesson
  + This lesson which combines Goffman’s (1959) theory of dramaturgy, the popular film *Mulan* (1998), and an exercise in the content analysis of a cultural artifact is relevant to the following types of courses, among others:
    - Upper level or contemporary theory courses.
    - Courses with an interest in identity, the self, interaction, culture, media, or entertainment.
    - Social psychology
    - Introduction to Sociology
* Teaching/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 the 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.
* Teaching Objectives
  + Reinforce students’ understanding of Goffman’s dramaturgy and sociology’s concerns with the self and interaction.
  + Elucidate the relationship between sociological understandings of the self and interaction to issues of emotion, identity, and gender.
  + Promote students’ comfort with and interest in content analysis of cultural products.
  + Reveal to students the relevance of sociological thought, especially Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy, for comprehending the experiences of themselves and others, including in fictional entertainment.

Both the Goals and Objectives of this lesson can be measured through the class's participation and engagement in the discussion of Disney movies, especially *Mulan* (1998), by way of Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy. Student engagement and learning can also be evaluated through written reflection papers and notes turned in after the class. During the analysis, each song is introduced with the question on the slide of “What your reaction to this song?” to encourage the students to apply theory themselves before hearing an analysis so they can generate their own thoughts and see for themselves their capacity for sociological thought. Moreover, the analysis as presented on each slide is primarily framed as questions in order to entice students to think about the dramaturgical issues and dynamics highlighted and generate their own contributions to the instructor’s presented analysis. This utilization of *Mulan* (1998) for illustrating Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy is intended to be a collaborative and stimulating exercise of the sociological imagination for both the students and instructor. By emphasizing that this analysis is one to be discussed and constructed together, students become active learners and apply, with the help of a guiding instructor, how relevant theory to understand not only their social world but the cultural products which inhabit it. Furthermore, the lesson ends with a group activity where students gather in groups, watch a Disney song from another film, and as a group engage in theoretically driven content analysis of the song which they then present to the entire class. Students also turn in their written reflections to reveal their individual engagement with the lesson and provide another avenue for them to compose and communicate their insights. Through the group activity and the reflections students’ ability to meet the goals and objectives of this lesson can be demonstrated and assessed, while also giving them experience in crucial research and analytical skills.

* Anticipated Learning Outcomes
  + Students will build upon and reinforce their understanding of the components of Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy and sociological concerns with the self and interaction.
  + 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.
  + Students will practice and discuss how to connect theories of the self and interaction to cultural objects through experience in content analysis.

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*Reference Information for Thumbnail Image*

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