

Impression Management in Services Marketing

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Comparisons between theatrical performances and everyday life are embedded in our language. A person doing a good job is said to be "well-suited for the role." When someone's behavior is stilted, it seems "scripted." A person behaving in unexpected ways is "acting out of character." In the academic literature, drawing links between theater and life is more formally called the "dramaturgical metaphor," and it is a cornerstone of impression management theory. Just as Shakespeare wrote that "all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players," impression management theorists propose that people enact "roles" and "scripts" on the "stages" of life.

Despite this metaphor's common use, some researchers have argued that it provides a shaky foundation for academic progress. For example, based on their work with psychiatric patients, Messinger, Sampson, and Towne (1962) suggest that people rarely feel like actors on a stage and that such feelings are more indicative of mental illness than everyday experience. Both Wilshire (1982) and Dewey (1969) argue that there are so many differences between theater and life that the dramaturgical metaphor is misleading and inappropriate for scientific inquiry. Dewey (1969) goes so far as to conclude with the hope that "dramaturgical analysis and description . . . will follow the mechanistic and organic models into the pages of histories of social thought, bereft of all but historical relevance for sociology and social psychology" (p. 310).

We concur with the spirit of these criticisms. A research paper or program that stops solely at proposing that life is like theater is unlikely to produce useful empirical and theoretical generalizations. The observation that one domain's

terminology is applicable to another may prompt creative metaphorical thinking (Polanyi 1964) and help with everyday understanding (Burke 1945; Fernandez 1986) but can be vulnerable to the criticism of being purely descriptive rather than explanatory, prescriptive, or predictive. While recognizing the limits to simply drawing comparisons between life and theater, however, it is important to note that most impression management scholars seek a more substantive goal in their research: to offer an analytic framework for exploring, testing, and understanding how people manage contradictions between appearance and reality in social interaction. Given this emphasis, impression management theory has considerable potential for the study and management of services marketing.

Service companies depend on front-line service workers to control and communicate the image that consumers will have of their product or service. Because image control often demands that service workers act according to scripts that diverge from their actual inherent preferences and capacities, a number of conflicts arise regarding the truthfulness or sincerity of service performances. For example, many service employees want to do a good job for their employers and yet sometimes find that performing well means being deceptive with customers. Service employees commonly must smile when they are frustrated, promise what may not be delivered, and treat seemingly mundane customer concerns with due earnestness and deference.

On the other side of the service relationship, customers often want to be served by a "real person," and yet they are also aware that service employees are paid for performing certain service scripts. When a hotel desk clerk tells a frequent customer that "It's nice to see you're staying here again," will the customer interpret this as a genuine expression of feeling or as a programmed response to a notation in the hotel's customer database? Which interpretation will result in higher satisfaction? To complicate matters further, consumers themselves are often trying to create impressions, so service workers must also try to gauge consumers' true intentions. Such scrutiny is particularly relevant, for example, when customers are applying for loans, making comments in a classroom, or describing an embarrassing illness to a medical professional.

Theatrical metaphors are useful for describing conflicts between appearance and reality because theatrical personnel explicitly tackle these conflicts in crafting their performances. Thus, the language of their profession provides researchers with a useful set of commonly accepted terms for exploring sincerity and deception. It is important, however, not to assume that scholars use dramaturgical terms only for metaphorical comparisons. Such an assumption misses the great promise and applicability of impression management research—a promise that, as we now shall show, has been only partially fulfilled in services marketing research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As Victor Turner's anthropological works have suggested (e.g., Turner 1988), the act of playing a role is one of human society's earliest rituals, beginning with the

ancient hunters who “transformed” themselves into the spirits of their prey. Ever since, the dynamics and pitfalls of pretense have been central to culture, literature, and philosophizing, ranging from Plato’s Dialogues and Shakespearean plays through the 19th-century works of William James and Charles Peirce to the present-day works of Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco. Because we do not know what others are truly thinking or intending when they act, we must determine their intentions based on the symbols and signs they offer to us (such as the clothes they wear or the gestures they use). Building from this basic social fact, George Herbert Mead (1934) and Herbert Blumer (1986) emphasized the symbolic nature of all society and founded a theoretical perspective called symbolic interactionism. Impression management research is an offshoot of symbolic interaction theory and can be thought of as an applied, empirical arm of this theoretical tradition.

Erving Goffman, a sociologist, is widely recognized as the founder of modern impression management theory. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959/1973) observed that people’s behaviors in social situations are strongly guided by the norms that exist for that situation. Goffman (1959/1973) calls these norms the “definition of the situation.” His term emphasizes that people actively—although often implicitly—develop a definitional consensus about each interaction, particularly concerning how people are to perform in it. This consensus can apply generally to many social situations or narrowly to a specific type of interaction. For example, in most social situations, people are prohibited from hitting one another, but contestants in a boxing ring are supposed to do so.

The expected sets of behaviors associated with each definition of the situation are called “roles” (Goffman 1959/1973; Solomon et al. 1985). “Role expectations” are sets of beliefs and subjective assumptions that people have about the appropriate conduct for individuals occupying a particular status in a social situation (Sarbin and Allen 1968, p. 498). In each situation, people are influenced by different role expectations, so each definition has a “role set” associated with it, which is a group of complementary behavioral expectations (Merton 1957).

Despite an endless variety of social situations and rules, most people from the same cultural background have a remarkable ability to determine quickly—based on environmental cues, socialization, and nonverbal signals from others—what the appropriate definition of a situation is. Alfred Schutz, a phenomenologist whose writings also influenced impression management theory, observes that this ability is due to the “stock of knowledge” that people have about social situations. This knowledge is developed via socialization and comprises social “recipes” that dictate appropriate behaviors in different situations (e.g., Schutz and Luckmann 1973, pp. 99-116). For example, experience dictates that waiters and waitresses who affect a helpful, deferential demeanor and deliver prompt service should receive tips. Both customers and service personnel depend on this “social recipe” to facilitate a smooth service encounter that satisfies both parties to the exchange.

Roles equate metaphorically to the sense of direction that an actor’s lines offer in a play—they are bundles of “social scripts” that dictate the type of impression that an individual must present. In both the theater and in everyday life, actors

have some latitude in their individual performance of a role, but just as an actor's behaviors are constrained by a script, a director, and the motivations of the "character" or role she or he is playing, social norms and personal goals usually limit an individual's everyday behaviors. For example, if a guest wishes to make a good impression at a dinner party, social norms are likely to keep him from saying that he does not like the food being served. If a job applicant wants to make a good impression at an interview, social expectations will encourage her to hide any nervousness she feels.

Although impression management theory does attend to how definitions of the situation govern frontstage behavior, it does not posit that people are completely bound by preset social recipes. Although most social activity will run smoothly because actors have a shared definition of the situation, there are occasions when people will disagree, and these require more explicit negotiation among actors (Grayson 1998a; Rafaeli 1989). For example, a graphic designer who runs her business from home may find that her clients fall into a more casual set of role behaviors (because of the home environment) despite her personal signals that they maintain a more professional role. Some consumers also gain value by purposefully breaking situational rules (Bitner, Booms, and Mohr 1994; Grayson 1999). For instance, a customer may enjoy the fun of driving a rental car in off-road environments despite the car rental company's restrictions against such behavior.

As these examples indicate, and as we have emphasized from the outset, individuals may often be required to act in ways that contradict their personal feelings and attitudes. Researching those occasions when a person's actual feelings diverge from his or her performed attitudes and emotions is a central concern for impression management theorists. To represent the potential divergence between appearance and reality, impression management scholars classify social interaction as occurring in two "regions" or, metaphorically, two theatrical stages (Goffman 1959/1973; Scheier and Carver 1983; Schlenker 1980). Members of the "audience" generally see one of these regions, called the "front stage," while the other region, called the "back stage," is generally hidden. Thus, in the back stage, people can take actions that, if seen, would contradict a desired impression. For example, a waiter who behaves abjectly at a diner's table can pass through kitchen doors and then, safely out of view, enter a backstage region where his show of deference can be dropped (Goffman 1959/1973). The back stage is also a region where people may, out of an audience's sight, prepare for frontstage performances, such as when amusement park workers put their costumes on in dressing rooms and when chefs prepare meals in kitchens beyond the view of patrons.

How people manage the borders between front- and backstage performances is a significant question to impression management theorists. In fact, a prominent stream of research in impression management scholarship addresses the scripts individuals use when they believe that their backstage "reality" has discredited their frontstage appearance and their ability to adhere to acceptable social norms. Goffman (e.g., 1967) referred to these scripts as attempts by the norm-breaker to "save face"—that is, to maintain his or her positive image. Accounts (Scott and Lyman 1968) and techniques of neutralization (Sykes and Matza 1957) are

among the rationalizing scripts that impression management scholars have examined, and these have been expanded and enriched by additional researchers (e.g., Gardner and Martinko 1988; Jones and Pittman 1982; Schlenker 1980).

Because impression management is conceived as an inherently social activity, marketing researchers have applied impression management theory primarily to services marketing activities, which are inherently more social than product marketing activities (Lovelock 1991, p. 7). Although we will emphasize services marketing issues in this chapter, it is important to note that the impression management framework can be applied to a wider range of business-related social phenomena, including product marketing (e.g., Folkes 1984) and intraorganizational behavior (e.g., Giacalone and Payne 1995). Even within services marketing, impression management can be applied in a number of ways. Grove and Fisk (e.g., 1989, 1991, 1992) have been among the strongest proponents for the benefits of applying a dramaturgical metaphor to services marketing. Their work (represented in Chapter 1 of this handbook) has been particularly useful in highlighting how impression management offers a useful framework for the development and implementation of new approaches to service management. However, as Grove and Fisk (1989, p. 427) point out, their approach is just one of many ways that impression management can be applied to services marketing, and in this chapter we emphasize some of the alternatives.

To do so, we examine four general issues that highlight additional ways in which impression management theory and research have been, and can be, applied in services marketing. First we describe the different "actors" in services marketing who can engage in impression management: service employees, service organizations, and service customers. We then address issues related to authentic and deceptive impression management and follow with a section on the relative influence of front- and backstage actions on consumer perceptions. We conclude with a discussion of how other academic literatures in marketing offer points of contact with impression management theory.

THE ACTORS: SERVICE PROVIDERS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND CUSTOMERS

Because the dramaturgical terms "front stage" and "back stage" denote physical spaces, they imply that impression management theory applies primarily to service environments. Indeed, impression management is useful for analyzing the design and management of service environments because it highlights the potential impact of making some areas visible to consumers and some areas hidden (e.g., Shostack 1981, 1987). Impression management theory was initially conceived, however, for application to human social action, and therefore can also be applied more metaphorically to people and even to organizations.

Scholars have frequently applied impression management theory to understand how service employees manage the expectations of service roles. There is a rich literature on the rigors of service performance and on the assessment of service

workers as actors. One of the most influential books in this tradition is Hochschild's (1983) *The Managed Heart*, which examines how students, flight attendants, and bill collectors handle social expectations for enacting required emotions and demeanor. There is a great dependency and pressure on service workers, who are often lowest on the organizational hierarchy, to fulfill the needs and implement the strategies of the service organizations that employ them. In particular, as the "front person," a service worker carries much of the responsibility for organizational representation. This is particularly true when the service worker's behaviors are a large part of what the service organization is offering to customers. For example, nearly every action and emotional display of a tour guide during the several days of a river-rafting trip shapes the very interpretation of the consumption experience of that extended service encounter (Price, Arnould, and Tierney 1995).

When considering the emotional demands placed on service workers, Hochschild (1983) coined the term "emotional labor"—labor that "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (p. 7). For example, Hochschild observes that, regardless of their personal feelings, flight attendants must often "manufacture smiles" for hundreds of passengers because airline managers view a flight attendant's pleasant demeanor as crucial to their product. Thus, emotional labor occurs when a waitress smiles even when she is angry, when a teacher is stern even when he prefers to be lenient, and when an attorney appears to remain neutral even when she is biased. Using Goffman's terms, emotional labor occurs when social requirements demand frontstage emotional displays that belie divergent backstage feelings.

Hochschild's (1983) book documents many ways that human beings in general and service providers in particular are asked to perform emotional labor, and how people manage these demands. Building from this work, Leidner (1993) further delineates the training process of emotional labor, examining how fast food organizations and large insurance companies teach and routinize emotional labor and impression management in their employees' service work. Together, these works identify a number of ethical and cultural implications associated with the growing emotional demands placed on service providers. The impact of emotional labor (and the associated influence of role conflict and role ambiguity) on service providers has promoted considerable additional research. For more detailed conceptual coverage, refer to Rafaeli and Sutton (1987, 1989) and Morris and Feldman (1996). Empirical studies include Boles and Babin (1996); Gaines and Jermier (1983); Hartline and Ferrell (1996); Staw, Sutton, and Pelled (1994); Sutton (1991); and Wharton and Erickson (1993). These studies and others paint a complex picture of emotional labor's antecedents and consequences, with mixed benefits for employees and employers.

A further issue relevant to impression management in service employees is what can be called the "casting" requirements of varied service roles. How does an individual's outward (frontstage) appearance affect the audience's willingness to accept him or her in a particular role? For example, men and women who perform jobs that are traditionally undertaken by the other gender (for example,

male nurses or female construction workers) report that audiences have difficulties accepting them as legitimate performers of those roles (Williams 1995). Audiences look for particular "legitimizing" characteristics, even though these characteristics sometimes do not tangibly affect the ability of the performer to perform the role. For example, male and female nurses are equally able to administer doses of medication, and male and female construction workers are equally able to maneuver a bulldozer. Gender stereotypes nevertheless can invade the audience's evaluation of these occupations to the extent that the physical characteristics of a service performer legitimate (or not) the performer's ability to play the role successfully. Audiences also use ethnicity and race as evaluative characteristics of performances, such as when people recommend ethnic restaurants based on observing members of that ethnic group eating there. Research by Neckerman and Kirschenman (1991), for example, has found that some employers will not hire minority candidates for certain jobs because of the employers' perceptions that audiences will not accept those candidates as legitimate performers of those roles (see also Ginsberg 1996). Employer concern for how audiences will interpret an actor's capacity for a role also may lead to subterfuge by employers and employees. For example, a legal or consulting intern might perform more important work backstage than can be revealed to a client in the front stage.

Just as people have front and back stages, so too do organizations. Managers, employees, and customers view organizations as entities with identities that are managed and controlled (Olins 1994). Organizational identity is crucial for attracting and sustaining consumers, for distinguishing an organization from competitors, and for maintaining employee morale. The potential impact of organizational identity is illustrated in research by Dutton and Dukerich (1991), who examine how perceptions of organizational identity affected employee and customer reactions to the management of a transportation service. Elsbach and Kramer (1996) have also documented how a threat to organizational identity can affect the behavior of employees in educational service organizations.

Other research has documented impression management strategies that companies use to influence perceptions of company image. Elsbach and Sutton (1992) examine how organizations involved with illegitimate activities (such as the "spiking" of trees by environmental activists) manage their front stages in ways that may be divergent from those employed at the back—depending on the audience. Similarly, Elsbach, Sutton, and Principe (1998) document how a hospital used "anticipatory impression management" techniques to minimize the potential impact of a change in policy on customers. Some researchers (e.g., Staw, McKechnie, and Puffer 1983) have even examined how organizational documents, such as annual reports, are crafted with varied impression management goals in mind. For example, Lutz (1983) has collected examples of "doublespeak," which is frontstage terminology that individuals and organizations use to diminish potential negative reactions to controversial backstage activities—such as referring to firing workers as providing them with a "new career alternative enhancement" program.

Surprisingly, the impression management actor studied least of all in services marketing research is the customer. Although scholars have documented decep-

tions by service workers (Maiken 1979; Mars 1982), much less attention has been paid to understanding how customers manage their own impressions in service environments, such as when homeowners misrepresent a home's condition to real estate agents or pretend to be surprised by the "high price" quoted by a merchant. When research does examine customers' impressions, it tends to study how they do or do not meet the role requirements of a particular service activity (e.g., Bitner, Booms, and Mohr 1994; Grove, Fisk, and Bitner 1992, pp. 102-4). This is a focus on the customer's front stage, but customers have back stages as well, which they will reveal or hide depending on the situation (Grove and Fisk 1992).

Some service professions are dedicated to assisting consumers with frontstage management, while other service workers specialize in penetrating peoples' backstage secrets. For example, plastic surgeons, beauticians, and personal trainers all provide frontstage "identity work" for their clients (e.g., Schouten 1991). Even the service workers themselves can become part of the client's front stage, such as in situations where "anybody who is anybody" has to have a particular professional working for them. Conversely, consumers may hire service workers who specialize in working in the back stage, such as psychologists, who help consumers understand their own back stages, or private detectives, who work clandestinely to reveal the backstage secrets of others (e.g., Shulman 1994).

In this section we have examined three "actors" in the service environment who can manage impressions: the service employee, the service organization, and the service customer. Although we have considered each of these social actors independently, they interact with one another in the service environment, and few researchers have made progress in understanding these interactions. For example, it is useful to consider the relative influence that service workers, employers, and customers have in determining the operating definition of the situation. The definition of the situation may be elastic to the degree that a customer, employer, or service worker has the relative power to influence it. For example, a customer may use the threat of a complaint to management or the reward of a monetary tip to convince a hotel worker to deliver room service after hours. Similarly, an aerobics instructor may manipulate peer pressure to encourage clients to "loosen up" and behave in unaccustomed ways. Furthermore, service firms, via employee regulation manuals, may demand that both customers and employees dress in particular clothing. The malleability of definitions of the situation in service work, and the relative power of each service actor to define the situation, should be better understood, given its consequence to all the involved parties.

MANIPULATING FRONT AND BACK STAGES: AUTHENTICITY, SINCERITY, AND DECEPTIVE IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Much impression management research has focused on how people construct an attractive or appropriate front stage in situations where the back stage is disagreeable or undesirable to the target audience (Goffman 1959/1973; Schlenker 1980,

p. 8). A deceptive construction may exist, however in another frontstage/backstage combination: an individual may construct a negative front stage in situations where the back stage is positive. Becker and Martin (1995), for example, found that some employees purposefully perform poorly at work to avoid workplace competition or challenging tasks.

Another possible front/backstage combination is having a front stage that accurately reflects the back. This has been called "authentic self-presentation" (Leary 1993, p. 146), "deep acting" (Hochschild 1983, p. 33), and "self projection" (Schlenker 1980, p. 8). It may initially seem as if "authentic self-presentation" should come naturally and is therefore not as worthy of study as more misleading impression management; however, the impression management framework emphasizes that all successful self-presentations, even the most authentic, do not "just happen" and require a keen understanding of the social rules in which the presentation occurs. Actors must communicate to audiences that what appears to be an honest performance actually is an honest performance. As Goffman (1959/1973) observes, a

Vogue model, by her clothing, stance, and facial expression, is able expressively to portray a cultivated understanding of the book she poses in her hand; but those who trouble to express themselves so appropriately will have very little time left over for reading. . . . Those who have the time and talent to perform a task well may not . . . have the time or talent to make it apparent that they are performing well. (pp. 32-33)

To be perceived as sincere, one must enact social behaviors according to accepted recipes of sincerity. This necessity presents a paradox: The behaviors dictated by the recipe might not be those that one would "sincerely" enact in the absence of social rules—a philosophical dilemma that attracted Sartre's (1956) attention on several occasions (cf. Trilling 1972). From a practical perspective, the implication is that being perceived as authentic does require strategic effort and is therefore an area that could benefit from inquiry.

Goffman (1959/1973) points out that "some organizations resolve this dilemma by officially delegating the dramatic function to a specialist who will spend his time expressing the meaning of the task and spend no time actually doing it" (p. 33). He is, of course, referring to marketing practitioners. Organizational theorists as well have written of the increasing "decoupling" of production and legitimization functions in contemporary organizations (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

Besides arising from unintentionally poor or amorally motivated performers, fraudulent impression management may also result from benevolent intentions. For example, doctors sometimes give anxious patients placebos to help them feel better, teachers sometimes give undeserved praise to encourage students, and shoe salespeople sometimes secretly bring a larger shoe size to customers because the size requested would have been too small (e.g., Goffman 1959/1973, p. 18). Regardless of whether the deception is intentional or benevolent, people are often interested in the extent to which the front stage matches the back. Impression management scholarship has developed a thorough capacity for researching and conceptualizing these issues. Goffman (1969), for example, has categorized

processes of "strategic interaction," where actors engage in "moves" and "countermoves" to expose inauthentic performances. There also is a rich literature on how individuals and organizations attempt to repair their images when they are caught "out of character," such as when an expert makes a discrediting mistake or when a person is caught betraying a friend's secret. Impression management theorists have inventoried specific tactics and excuses people use to smooth out the "strained interactions" that result either from actors having to manage physical and social stigmas or from actors having to compensate for failing to perform as they are expected (see Goffman 1963 and Scott and Lyman 1968 for classic examples).

THE IMPACT OF THE FRONT STAGE AND BACK STAGE ON CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS

The scope of impression management research need not be limited only to visual elements of services marketing. Some researchers do emphasize this element: Front stage is the area that can be seen by the consumer, and back stage is the area that cannot (Gummesson 1990, p. 44; Lovelock 1991, p. 14; Shostack 1987). The front stage, however, may also include aural, olfactory, and tactile elements. In fact, when a "talking Yellow Pages" service gives restaurant advice by phone, this service's front stage is wholly aural.

More important, by defining the back stage as what consumers cannot see, marketers often conclude that the back stage cannot influence consumer perceptions. In Lovelock's (1991) words, the back stage "is of little interest to customers. Like any audience, [customers] evaluate the production with reference to those elements that they actually experience" (p. 14). The managerial utility of this perspective is illustrated by Matteis (1979) in his analysis of Citibank's customer satisfaction efforts in the 1970s. By streamlining account processing activities, Citibank managers increased efficiency, reduced costs, and improved employee morale, but the impact on customer evaluations was weak. Matteis (1979) concluded that Citibank's efforts were ineffective at the consumer level because the changes were entirely backstage and were not directly communicated using frontstage activity. Similarly, Mangold and Babakus (1991) found that service employees' perceptions of a service are often different from those of their customers because the employees are exposed to backstage areas of which customers are not aware.

Although observations like these are useful, they overlook some important contributions that an impression management orientation can make in researching services marketing. Although front and back stage are often physically separated, the distinction between front and back stage is socially, not physically, determined (MacCannell 1976, p. 92). Consumer judgments of the marketer's intention, not physical barriers, create the critical dividing line between front and back stage. Consumers examine the cues presented by the marketer and make a decision about whether this is frontstage or backstage information. In the language of impression

management, this means that the consumer makes a judgment about whether or not the marketer has successfully “performed” a particular “social reality” (Goffman 1959/1973, pp. 65-66; Sarbin and Allen 1968; Schlenker 1980, pp. 98-105). If the consumer believes that the marketer is primarily trying to make a certain consumer impression, the marketer has successfully enacted a frontstage performance. If the consumer believes that the marketer is not altering things so as to make such an impression, then the marketer has enacted a backstage performance.

The idea that consumers might be influenced by what they believe to be the back stage is widely mentioned by scholars, although not often emphasized (Goffman 1959/1973, p. 209; Grove and Fisk 1989, p. 436; Price, Arnould, and Tierney 1995, p. 90; Schlenker 1980; Tedeschi and Riess 1981; Thomas 1937, p. 137). The managerial benefits of managing the back stage are illustrated in Grayson’s (1998b) study of consumer responses to a hotel scenario. Here, customer exposure to the “perceived back stage” did, under certain conditions, affect consumer attitudes toward the service.

ACADEMIC LITERATURES WITH RELEVANCE TO IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Given that impression management addresses the ubiquitous activity of controlling one’s image, it has relevance to a wide range of human activities and academic literature. For example, persuasion research is also concerned with how people influence other people’s perceptions and opinions (Keller and Block 1996; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schuman 1983). Whereas persuasion research tends to examine the manipulation and perception of factual information (such as the quality of a camera or the performance of an automobile), however, impression management research tends to examine the manipulation and perception of more social information (such as the integrity of an attorney or the politeness of a waiter). As a result, persuasion research tends to invoke cognitive explanations for its phenomena, whereas impression management research tends to invoke social or social-psychological explanations.

The flip side of impression management—and therefore its close ally—is attribution theory. Whereas the former examines strategies that people use to influence other people’s impressions, the latter examines how people respond (i.e., make attributions) to impression management activities. Accordingly, it is natural that research in one theoretical domain will lead to observations that are relevant to the other: Response tendencies will affect the strategies designed to influence these responses. For example, although Staw, McKechnie, and Puffer (1983) examine the strategies that companies use to justify their performance, they use attribution theory as a way of examining these strategies. When Bitner (1990) examines how consumers respond to different accounts for service failure, she is inherently exploring the different accounts that service providers use to manage their images. Attribution theory, however, is not the only theoretical base

for understanding customer responses to impression management activity. For example, a pair of studies by Rafaeli and Sutton (Rafaeli and Sutton 1990; Sutton and Rafaeli 1988) point to the potential impact of the service context (e.g., busy stores versus quiet ones) on perceptions of emotional display in convenience stores. In addition, Grayson (1998b) suggests that social-psychological theories relating to trust and self-disclosure offer a foundation for predicting customer responses to emotional display in hotels.

Another related academic literature is that focusing on "interpersonal deception theory" (Buller and Burgoon 1996). Researchers pursuing this type of research do not invoke the dramaturgical metaphor; however, they are interested in the strategies that actors use when trying to deceive one another and the skills required to know whether or not someone is being deceptive. What is perhaps most interesting about this literature is the finding that individuals generally do not make accurate assessments of other people's deceptiveness or sincerity (Ekman and O'Sullivan 1991; Fleming et al. 1990; Poole and Craig 1992). Certain facial cues, however, have been shown to indicate deceptive communication (Ekman, Freisen, and O'Sullivan 1988), and increased suspicion has been shown (in some circumstances) to increase one's ability to detect deception (McCornack and Levine 1990). Alternatively, there has been little research exploring the skills and resources actors require to sustain and conceal deceptive back- and frontstage performances. Hence, when a service must be marketed or an issue negotiated, the ability to bluff and camouflage one's true feelings draws on performance resources and skills that are not well understood. Although there is a burgeoning literature on how to detect deception, there is a clear need to understand better the architecture and performance of successful deceptions.

CONCLUSION: IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT AND IDENTITY

Impression management is just one of many potential perspectives on social life. Although it has proven useful to researchers seeking to understand social interaction, alternative perspectives have been raised. One potential criticism of impression management theory is that it presents an overly simplistic and binary view of the self (Wilshire 1982). Some researchers view impression management theory as proposing that the self comprises a "real" self in the back stage and a performed self (one that is to some extent "unreal") in the front. The roles that people play, however, have been shown to have an influence on the self (Thoits 1983), which suggests that an individual's front stage is as much a "real" part of the self as his or her back stage. In fact, Silver and Sabini (1985) go so far as to argue that the impression management framework has no room for a "real" self because it depends so heavily on social rules and restrictions.

Goffman himself supported this latter view. Those who advocate the Western view of an authentic self worry about the effects of displaying contradictory pretenses to the world; their concern is not to let "their masks become their face."

Goffman, however, argued that there is no authentic self behind the masks. In Goffman's view, individual identity exists only as layers of different external self-presentations. From his perspective, there are only masks, and each mask comes with an accompanying identity that people "wear" until switching to a different mask. Goffman's view is consistent at a basic level with the postmodern perspective that there is no unitary (or authentic) identity, and that one's self is fragmented by the many social demands placed on each individual as he or she moves from one interactional relationship to another (Lyotard 1979, p. 15).

Is there an authentic individual identity, or is it just an individual image that appears authentic to others? Do people possess an intrinsic individuality, or are they simply able to express an image that appears individual to others? One reading of impression management theorizing suggests that a real self exists in the back stage and that one's performed self can accurately or inaccurately reflect this self via social interaction. This view of the self may oversimplify the real complexity of managing identity in our current social climate, but it does reflect an everyday view held by many people as they go through their everyday interactions throughout the world. Although different cultures place different emphases on the balance that should be placed on front stage and back stage, the idea that everyone has a "real self" is a common assumption in daily life throughout the world (e.g., Abiodun, Drewal, and Pemberton 1990; Cheek and Hogan 1983; Drewal 1977; Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss 1975; Hamaguchi 1985; Scheier and Carver 1983). Thus, it is useful to study how this view of the self affects human interaction in general and service interactions in particular.

Furthermore, as Goffman's own writings indicate, this simplistic view of the self is not the only way to use impression management theory as a basis for research and management insight. Impression management research is more generally concerned with how people manage contradictions between appearance and reality in social interaction; thus, it offers a number of perspectives and tools for tackling these often difficult social issues. The issue of human identity is so complex that one perspective will never offer a complete picture of its inner workings, but impression management theory is uniquely positioned to prompt questions about identity that not only are important to both research and management, but also are not prompted by other theoretical perspectives.

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