

**Observation of Facework at The Campus Activity Centre:
Thompson Rivers University**

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Introduction

For this observation study, our group went to the Campus Activity Centre (CAC) at Thompson Rivers University on a Friday from 3-4 pm. This observational study aims to observe people performing facework in different incidents. Our task involved recording a description and analysis of what we observed. The observation produced surprising results about how people behave in a public venue. Our analysis was based on the facework we recorded. Our research is based on Goffman's theory of interpretive framework, and how it applies to everyday situations with ordinary people. Most of what we saw was saving face and corrective face loss, which served as the interpretive framework for our analysis.

Paul Butland Observations

While sitting in the CAC at TRU and observing people's behaviours, I recorded two different dramas of interactions through facework. First, I watched a young student (woman) dressed in black appearing relaxed, with her back turned to the coffee shop and behaving modestly around 3:05 pm. The barista at the coffee shop seemed to lead the interaction and appeared 'in-face,' leaning into the conversation. Both individuals communicated correction of face loss through politeness and, to some extent, avoidance.

Second, I observed an interaction between a couple sitting together on their laptops and conversing. There was a middle-aged bald man in a blue shirt with a blue cap and a woman wearing a black top with dark hair around 3:10 pm. These two people were balancing face, with the man sitting back with arms folded and being reserved while the young woman with the black top was directing the 'script' of the conversation. The woman in this interaction is an excellent example of Goffman's theory of 'in-face' behaviour by showing confidence and assurance in the line she's taking. On the other hand, the man appeared to be 'out of face' by withdrawing from the conversation. Goffman states, "The combined effect of the rule of self-respect and the rule of considerateness is that the person tends to conduct himself during an encounter to maintain both his own face and the face of the other participants" (Goffman, p. 11). Both of these observations mentioned above show a theme of correction of face-loss through politeness and avoidance or process of revision of face-loss.

Robert Mcalaster Observations

The observations recorded in my analysis of two people occurred during a mid-Monday afternoon at TRU. The first individual (now referred to as FS1) was a young blonde woman, approximately 18-22 years of age. The second individual (now referred to as FS2), a brunette, was also female, around the same age range. During the roughly 20 minutes of observation, the two subjects engaged in several instances of facework.

Of the two people, subject one was the conversation leader. Throughout the conversation, she delivered several “lines” (Goffman, pg. 7). Most of the conversation seemed to be centered around a conflict at the workplace of FS1. FS1 communicated to FS2 that she had been advised of a potential monetary bonus at work. However, FS1 told her companion that she had turned down the offer. Her reasoning, FS1 explained, was that she felt it was unfair to receive a bonus if none of her co-workers received the same.

FS1 was constructing a self-image through her lines and facework, which she likely hoped would be accepted by FS2. The image this researcher believes she meant to construct was one of a selfless person who was more concerned about fairness in the workplace, than monetary gain.

FS2, for her part, delivered “lines” of quiet agreement throughout the conversation. These “lines” consisted of phrases such as “Oh, yeah, for sure,” “I totally get that,” and “What a great idea.” However, the tone and intonation used by FS2 made the statements sound more like platitudes than actual agreement.

Between the two individuals, a “kind of mutual acceptance” appeared to be at work in this face-to-face interaction (Goffman, pg. 7). For Goffman, the purpose of the interaction between the subjects was to produce a “[...] “working” acceptance, not a “real” one, since it” appeared to be based “not on agreement of candidly expressed heart-felt evaluations, but upon a willingness to give temporary lip service to judgments with which the participants do not really agree” (Goffman, pg. 1).

Whether or not FS1 understood that FS2 was giving her lip service or not is unclear. Furthermore, it is unclear if FS2 was aware of the “full consequences of [her] face-saving

actions” (Goffman, pg. 8). This, Goffman suggests, is because FS2’s face-saving practices had become “habitual and standardized” through previous interactions (Goffman, pg. 8).

Kei Massalski Observations

One participant was a man wearing a gray sweater, a black hat, and black jeans, with a beard. He was studying in the cafeteria around 3:15 PM, and as he was packing to leave, he knocked over his water bottle causing a loud noise. A few seconds later, several people in the cafeteria turned around to observe him, which he then uttered a vulgarity just loud enough for people within his vicinity to hear. He kept his head down, not making eye contact with anyone, and left soon after packing up.

Goffman states “by entering a situation where he is given a face to maintain, a person takes on the responsibility of standing guard over the flow of events as they pass before him. He must ensure a particular expressive order is sustained” (pg. 9). In this instance, by entering the cafeteria during a quiet instance in which many students were studying, the man was expected to maintain the quiet, as every other student is maintaining face by keeping to themselves, allowing other students to concentrate. The man undoubtedly understood this, as until his accident he was non-disruptive. But by disrupting the quiet cafeteria space, he is expected to conduct face-work. Goffman separates basic face-work into two main categories - the avoidance process and the corrective process (pg. 15, 19). Analyzing the incident, at first the man remained silent. However, it wasn’t until other students turned to face the noise that he expressed his grief. Therefore, the man expressed both categories of face-work - avoidance, then correction. Goffman states “When a person fails to prevent an incident, he can still attempt to maintain fiction that no threat has occurred” (pg. 17). After noticing the attention, he drew to himself, he uttered a vulgarity both loud enough for others to hear whilst being quiet enough not to disrupt the space. By doing this, he maintains face by expressing remorse to his own actions - accepting responsibility, whilst demonstrating his understanding of an acceptable volume-level, exemplifying the corrective process. Goffman elaborates on this, stating “[a person who demonstrates the corrective process] can provide punishment, penance, and expiation for himself”, and that “even though the offender may fail to prove his innocence, he can suggest through these means that he is now a renewed person, a person who has paid for his sin against

the expressive order and is once more to be trusted in the judgmental scene” (pg. 21). The man also demonstrates the use of a Line by saying a singular vulgar word. The word itself lacks meaning, however the vulgarity and strength of the word carries forth the views of his actions as the word packs more impact.

Yunuo Yang Observations

After reading Goffman's face theory my group decided to meet at the campus activity center. We discussed the article and went through it one more time. We sit at one table and began to observe other people in the area. I am going to describe what I observed and analyze people's behavior by Goffman's face theory.

Surprisingly the first subject I observed was actually my communication class group. During our discussion about Goffman's article, Robert was explaining the concepts of the theory to me and communication has established. I found that at a subconscious level my body was closer to Robert and I kept nodding. Also, I responded and ask questions to Robert. In that case, Robert was in face. He felt confident and was leading the conversation. Goffman stated that, "I have already said that the person will have two points of view-a defensive orientation toward saving his own face and a protective orientation toward saving the other's face."(Goffman, p. 6). On the hand, I was saving Robert and my face. Robert was a student discussing course material with his classmate and he definitely did not want to be ignored. I kept interacting with Robert to maintain his respected image. I was also a university student and by interacting with Robert I was saving my face because I did not want to be rude.

The second subject was a conversation between a coffee shop employee and a customer. The Coffee shop employee did not hear clearly the customer's order. Suddenly at that moment, the employee was out of face because the employee did not take the order though it was not the employee's fault. The employee then used politeness to fix the face. The employee asked, "Pardon me, what is your order again?". According to Goffman the process of fixing face involved the acceptance of another person in the conversation," the persons to whom the offering is made can accept it as a satisfactory means of re-establishing the expressive order and the faces supported by this order. Only then can the offender cease the major part of his ritual

offering."(Goffman, p. 10). As a result, the customer accepted the apology and repeated his order. The face was successfully restored.

In conclusion, the analysis demonstrated the application of Goffman's face theory in the real life. The status of face is dynamic and people can lose face easily. People use face work to maintain positive faces in daily interactions with each other. Therefore, communication in society can be smooth and comfortable.

Reflection/Analysis

Our analysis of facework concluded that the subjects under observation displayed many examples of saving face and corrective face loss. Throughout these observations, our group determined there was an interpretive framework of face-saving methods and corrective face-loss rituals, while the subjects balanced 'face' during their interactions. In Robert's analysis of FS1 and FS2, he identified an instance where FS1 was constructing a self-image through her lines and facework, while FS2 delivered "lines" of quiet agreement throughout the conversation. We can see Goffman's theory when a person maintains face during contact, and it tends to be legitimate and institutionalized (Goffman, p. 7). There was an overall mutual acceptance of facework between these two individuals.

Kei's observation of a man entering the cafeteria quietly, then having an accident while students were studying, presents an excellent example of one person disrupting another person/person's quiet environment of keeping face. After the accident, the man expressed grief about causing an incident and showed avoidance, and then correction. As Kei points out, this is Goffman's theory of facework – the avoidance and corrective processes (Goffman, p. 15, 19). Once again, we can see the methods of saving face and corrective face loss. The themes throughout these observations reveal how the participants under study showed a balance of face and correction of face loss while trying to appear to fix the situation or encounter. As Goffman states, "by entering a situation where he is given a face to maintain, a person takes on the responsibility of standing guard over the flow of events as they pass before him. He must ensure a particular expressive order is sustained" (Goffman, p. 9). Kei refers to Goffman's theory by using the example of one individual maintaining face and being expected to behave appropriately; instead, this person has

to correct face loss by uttering a vulgarity, as mentioned in Kei's observation, and using the corrective process.

This analysis shows how our group observed people in a normal, quiet area of the university and the methods these individuals used to perform interpretive frameworks of face-saving methods and corrective face loss. Although these observations were conducted discreetly, many incidences of facework were observed, including participants' delivery of "lines" and politeness. These observations made it clear to our group how the social world works, and the lengths people will go to avoid face loss and shame.

Conclusion

Our observations revealed that facework is present in conversation and behaviour through the interpretive framework of face-saving and corrective face-loss procedures. However, we also saw the importance of balancing face in everyday social interactions. Through preventative face loss and corrective face loss, people balance their face and show modesty, discretion, and avoidance behaviors. Communication between people is essential in every situation, whether public or private.

The observation also revealed the value of each person's positive line taken during social interactions and how they show their true self through these encounters. For example, people tend to take a position of politeness by not hurting others' feelings; by doing this, they are correcting their face and maintaining their position of trying to dominate the conversation. Moreover, the examples of facework showed much more levels of communication than we expected, probably due to the fact the CAC was less crowded and busy than usual. Finally, the observation made it clear to us that Goffman's theories can be seen in the areas of cultural communication discussed in class. These observations were helpful in understanding that Goffman's theory of facework is evident in everyday human interactions.

References

Goffman, E. (1967). *On Face-Work, An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction* (pp. 5).
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