CHAPTER 12

SOCIAL INTERACTION AND DAILY LIFE

CONTENTS

Online gaming is extremely popular and, though existing friends play together, many young people say they have made new friends through gaming and social media – a small example of the way that digital media facilitates new forms of communication and social interaction.

If online social media such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram are to be believed, people today have never had so many friends. But are online 'friends' really friends or merely followers, contacts and acquaintances? Research by the Pew Research Center found that 57 per cent of teenagers (those aged thirteen to seventeen) in the USA had made at least one new friend online, mostly via gaming (36 per cent) or on social media (64 per cent). Some 29 per cent had made more than five new friends online. Boys made more friends through networked gaming, 71 per cent of them using voice connections to communicate with friends during play. Girls made more friends on social media, with almost one-third (32 per cent) using instant messaging to communicate with friends every day (Lenhart et al. 2015: 2–5). Interacting online clearly has the potential to expand friendship networks.

This survey opens a window into the ways in which young people are navigating their friendships in the digital age, and the findings raise an important issue for sociologists. Could online friending and unfriending, following and unfollowing, be changing the definition and meaning of friendship itself? The survey found that 80 per cent of teenagers had never met any of their online friends in person, suggesting that, for most teenagers, online friendships stay online. Yet 68 per cent of US teenagers said that their social media friends and contacts had helped them through some difficult times, a crucial part of what it means to be 'a good friend'. Perhaps online-only interactions *can* produce some of the elements we expect of genuine friendships.

The Pew survey also hints at some of the negative aspects of online interaction. Some 88 per cent thought that people share too much personal information on social media, 39 per cent felt pressure to post content that would make them more popular, 26 per cent had become involved in conflict with a friend over online posts, and 21 per cent reported feeling worse about their lives because of what they saw on social media (Lenhart et al. 2015: 6–11); 68 per cent reported seeing social media users 'stirring up drama', a phrase often used to discuss bullying.

Bullying and harassment can have severe psychological consequences long after the bullying has ended. Laura Martocci (2015: xi–xii) describes the way that memories of being bullied in the past came back while she studied for a doctorate: '[Yet] even now, as I sit in front of my computer and contemplate sharing this story I shudder, I feel a faint inner quaking. I imagine *her* reading the words and reviving her campaigns of subversion. I can *feel* the exaggerated eye roll that curdled my confidence, the one that preceded a contemptuous "*Ohhhh pleeeeeeassse*" . . . .' For Martocci, being bullied was an experience that changed her own self-concept, the very essence of her identity. She asks, 'What could have caused me to view accomplishments as inconsequential and self-image as fraudulent? How did I come to believe that the angry, insecure woman I was reduced to was my true self, unmasked at last?'

The basis of a sociological answer comes in the realization that our individual self is not a 'thing', like a 'pearl' sitting within the 'shell' of the biological human body. Rather, the self is, in part, a social creation that is built from a whole series of relationships and interactions with other people. That is why the type and quality of the interactions we have with others have the potential to change our perception of who we 'really' are – our true self, as it were. Bullying, however else we may characterize it, is a particular type of social interaction which involves the attempt to exercise power over others.

> Sociological theories of self-formation and identity can be found in chapter 14, 'The Life Course', and chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives'.

Cyberbullying is 'an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself' (Smith et al. 2008: 376). This can be an extension of physical bullying, but in many cases it is wholly online, through text, email or social media. Those involved in the interaction may never meet face to face, but, like traditional bullying, the cyber form uses gossip, stigmatizing, stereotyping, ostracizing and shaming. Unlike traditional forms, comments on gaming sites or internet forums have a much wider reach.

John Halligan (2012: vii), whose thirteen-year-old son Ryan took his own life as a result of being bullied, points out that 'It's one thing to be bullied and humiliated in front of a few kids. It's one thing to feel rejection and have your heart crushed by a girl. But it must be a totally different experience, compared to a generation ago, to have these hurts and humiliation witnessed by a far larger, online adolescent audience.' By contrast, internet bullies and so-called trolls (who set out to disrupt forums or provoke emotional responses) operate anonymously and are able to depersonalize their targets, thereby avoiding the emotional consequences

and protecting their own self-image. New forms of friendship and online bullying behaviour are just two aspects of the digital age which sociologists are striving to understand. But existing theories and concepts from studies of social interaction are an excellent place to begin that task.

Next, we set out some key concepts and ideas which sociologists have used to study the micro level of social interactions. Many, though by no means all, of these ideas and concepts developed within the interactionist tradition before becoming common currency in sociology. We begin with some 'hidden' aspects of human communication, such as unacknowledged body language and gestures, before moving on to look at the unwritten 'rules' of interaction and what happens when we break those rules. From here we are able to set our encounters within shifting social contexts, and in the final sections we explore some of the emerging rules and norms of behaviour in online environments. The chapter ends with the question of whether people will still privilege face-to-face contact over cyber communication as daily life becomes saturated with digital devices and online environments.

> A detailed discussion of the interactionist tradition can be found in chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives'.

Studying the micro level

Walk through a crowded shopping centre or step onto a busy train and you will notice people glancing at one another quickly before looking away again to carry on walking or to find a seat, usually without conversing. These people, including ourselves, are demonstrating what Erving Goffman (1967, 1971) calls civil inattention, which is not the same as just ignoring each other. Each individual indicates recognition of other people but avoids any gesture that might be seen as intrusive or which might be perceived

as hostile. In a sense, civil inattention is the opposite of bullying. While the latter is action focused and targeted on a specific individual, the former represents a studious yet, with practice, more or less unconscious form of *avoidance* of direct contact.

Civil inattention is something we may all recognize, but why should sociologists concern themselves with such apparently trivial aspects of life? Passing someone on the street or exchanging a few words with a friend are things we do countless times every day. Yet, just because we do not have to think about our everyday routines does not mean they fall outside sociological analysis. In fact, Alfred Schutz (1899–1959) saw them as the starting point for phenomenology – the study of how people arrive at that taken-for-granted attitude and how it is reproduced in interactions (see chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives', for a discussion of Schutz and phenomenology).

Conventionally, interaction is taken to mean face-to-face meetings or 'the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence' (Goffman 1990 [1959]: 26). With the advent of online environments such as chatrooms, blogs and social media, a broader definition that takes in these new forms seems appropriate. Alex Dennis and his colleagues (2013: 1) suggest that social interaction can be defined as 'the actions and responses of people to each other's activities'. The study of apparently insignificant forms of social interaction is of major importance in sociology and is one of the discipline's most absorbing subjects. There are three main reasons for this.

First, our day-to-day routines and constant interactions with others give structure and form to what we do. We can learn a great deal about ourselves as social beings and about the nature of social life from studying them. Our lives are organized around the repetition of similar patterns of behaviour from day to day, and we may only realize this when they are disrupted. The 2019-20 Covid-19 pandemic was just such a radical disruption, as many workplaces, schools and colleges were closed, and people were

forced to stay at home and told not to meet with friends and family. With regular social spaces effectively closed down, many people reported that they struggled to fill their days or construct a meaningful new daily routine.

Think of what you did yesterday and the day before that. If they were both weekdays, it is likely that you got up at about the same time each day. If you are a student, you may have gone to a class in the morning, making the journey from home to campus that you do most weekdays. Of course, the everyday routines we follow are not identical and our patterns of activity at weekends usually contrast with those on weekdays. If we make a major change such as leaving college to take a job, alterations in daily routines are necessary, but we establish a new and fairly regular set of habits all over again.

Second, the study of daily life reveals how humans act creatively to shape social reality. Although our behaviour is guided by social roles, norms and shared expectations, individuals perceive reality differently according to their background, interests and motivations. Because individuals are capable of creative action, they continuously shape reality through the decisions and actions they take. In other words, social reality is not a fixed or static 'thing' but is created through human interaction. This idea of the 'social construction of reality' lies at the heart of the symbolic interactionist perspective and was introduced briefly in chapter 1 (see chapter 5, 'The Environment', for a more detailed outline of social constructionism).

Third, studying social interaction sheds light on social institutions. All social institutions depend on the patterns of social interaction that we engage in daily. Consider again the case of two strangers passing in the street. The event may seem to have little direct relevance to large-scale, structured and more permanent forms of social organization. But when we take into account many, many such interactions, this is no longer so. In the contemporary world, most people live in towns and cities and constantly interact with people they do not know personally. But the bustling crowds and fleeting,

impersonal contacts give city life its vibrant character. City life is effectively reproduced via the myriad interactions of both inhabitants and visitors.

Keep in mind that micro-level everyday practices are not separate from the large-scale, macro features of social life that we explore in other chapters. Indeed, some of the very best sociological work connects micro and macro phenomena to give us a more detailed and rounded picture of the social world.

> Theories of the impact of social structures on the everyday 'lifeworld' can be found in chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives'.

Non-verbal communication

Social interaction involves numerous forms of non-verbal communication – the exchange of information and meaning through facial expressions, gestures and movements of the body. Non-verbal communication is sometimes referred to as 'body language', but this can be misleading, because people characteristically use non-verbal cues to eliminate or expand on what is said with words.

The human face, gestures and emotions

A central feature of non-verbal communication is the facial expression of emotions. When we compare the human face with other species, it does seem remarkably flexible and capable of manipulation. The German sociologist Norbert Elias (1897–1990) argued that studying the face shows how human beings, like all other species, have naturally evolved over a long period of time, but also how this biological basis has been overlain with cultural features in the process of *social development*.

Compare the human face with that of our closest evolutionary relatives, the apes. The ape face is furry and quite rigid in structure, permitting a

Paul Ekman's photographs of the facial expressions of a tribesman from a remote community in New Guinea tested the idea that there are basic modes of emotional expression. Look carefully at each facial expression. Which of the six emotions used by Ekman above do you think is being conveyed in each one? Check by looking at the 'Thinking critically' box on the next page.

limited amount of movement. The human face, in contrast, is naked and very flexible, capable of contorting into a wide variety of positions. In some parts of the world, 'gurning' competitions are even held to see who can pull the strangest facial expressions, and some of these appear *very* strange indeed. Without this evolved physiological malleability, human communication as we know it would be impossible. Therefore, Elias (1987a) sees the development of the human face as closely linked to the evolutionary 'survival value' of effective communication systems. While apes do make extensive use of 'whole body' communication, humans can communicate a varied range of emotions on just the 'signalling board' of the face. For Elias, facial communication demonstrates that, in human beings, the biological and the social are inextricably intertwined. As Martocci records in our chapter introduction, even a simple rolling of the eyes and the meaning it conveys can exert an impact that lasts a lifetime.

The American psychologist Paul Ekman and his colleagues developed a Facial Action Coding System (FACS) to describe movements of the facial muscles that give rise to particular expressions. Their system aimed at injecting precision into an area notoriously open to inconsistent and contradictory interpretations. This is because there has been little agreement

about how emotions should be identified and classified. Charles Darwin claimed that there are basic modes of emotional expression that are common across the human species. And, though this is disputed, Ekman's research, covering people from widely different cultures, provides some supportive evidence. Ekman and Friesen (1978) carried out a study of an isolated community in New Guinea whose members had virtually no contact with outsiders. When they were shown pictures of faces expressing six emotions (happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, fear, surprise), the New Guineans were able to identify which emotions were being expressed.

Ekman argues that the results of his own and similar studies support the view that the facial expression of emotion and its interpretation are innate in human beings, though he acknowledges the evidence does not conclusively demonstrate this as it may be that widely shared cultural learning is involved. Nonetheless, other types of research support his conclusion. The human ethologist Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1973) studied six children who were born deaf and blind to see how far their facial expressions were similar in particular emotional situations to those of sighted, hearing individuals. He found that the children smiled when engaged in obviously pleasurable activities, raised their eyebrows in surprise when sniffing an object

THINKING CRITICALLY

From left to right, Ekman's instructions were to show how your face would look if:

1 your friend had come and you were *happy*
2 your child had died and you were *sad*
3 you were *angry* and about to fight
4 you saw a dead pig that had been lying there a long time: *disgust*.

Is it easier to see the emotions being expressed when you know the context? Have you ever misunderstood how someone is feeling, and, if so, why did their facial expression not give away their emotional state?

with an unaccustomed smell and frowned when repeatedly offered an object they disliked. Using the FACS, Ekman and Friesen identified a number of discrete facial muscle actions in new-born infants that are also found in adult expressions of emotion. For instance, infants seem to produce facial expressions similar to the adult expression of disgust (pursing the lips and frowning) in response to sour tastes.

Although the facial expression of emotion seems to be innate, individual and cultural factors influence the exact form that facial movements take and the contexts in which they are deemed appropriate. Exactly *how* people smile, the precise movement of the lips and other facial muscles, and how fleeting the smile is all vary between cultures.

By contrast, there are no gestures or bodily postures that have been shown to characterize all, or even most, cultures. In some societies, people nod when they mean 'no' while in others a nod means 'yes'. Gestures that Europeans and Americans tend to use a great deal, such as finger pointing, seem not to exist in other cultures (Bull 1983). Similarly, a straightened forefinger placed at the centre of the cheek and rotated is used in parts of Italy as a gesture of praise, but seems unknown elsewhere. Like facial expressions,

gestures and bodily posture are used to fill out our utterances as well as conveying meanings when nothing is actually spoken. All three can be used to joke or show irony or scepticism.

The non-verbal impressions we convey often inadvertently indicate that what we say is not quite what we mean. Blushing is perhaps the most obvious example of how physical indicators can contradict our stated meanings. But there are more subtle signs that can be picked up by other people. A trained eye can often detect deceit by studying non-verbal cues. Sweating, fidgeting, staring or shifting eyes and facial expressions held for a long time (genuine facial expressions tend to evaporate after four or five seconds) could indicate that a person is acting deceptively. Thus, we use the facial expressions and bodily gestures of other people to add to what they communicate verbally and to check how far they are sincere and whether they can be trusted.

Gender and the body

Marcel Mauss (1973) was among the first to argue that gestures and bodily movements are not simply natural but are linked to social context. People learn how to use their bodies in walking, digging, eating, and much more, and these 'techniques of the body' are transmitted across generations. But is there a gender dimension to everyday social interactions? Because interactions are shaped by the larger social context, it is not really surprising that both verbal and non-verbal communication may be perceived and expressed differently by men and women. There are also social class and ethnic dimensions to embodied interactions.

The political philosopher Iris Marion Young (1949-2006) explored gendered bodily experience in a famous article, 'Throwing Like a Girl' (1980, 2005). Young argued that the apparently distinctive 'half-hearted' movements made by women - such as throwing a ball or stones - are not biologically determined but the product of discourses and practices which encourage girls and young women to experience their bodies as 'objects for others'. Such bodily training

On public transport, 'manspreading' – the open posture often adopted by men – is a routine expression of male power, contrasting with the inward-directed posture of women. In 2017, Madrid authorities included manspreading in its list of prohibitions on public transport.
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embodies an 'inhibited intentionality' reflecting feminine norms of restricted bodily comportment and movement. In short, male-dominated societies produce a majority of women who are essentially 'physically handicapped'. In contrast, men learn to experience their bodies as active and forceful 'objects for themselves', which is reflected in their more aggressive bodily movements, particularly noticeable in sports. For young boys, therefore, to be accused of 'throwing like a girl' is a dreadful insult and an attack on their male identity.

These dynamics are evident even in routine social interactions. Take one of the most common non-verbal expressions: eye contact. Individuals use eye contact in a wide variety of ways, often to catch someone's attention or to begin a social interaction, but, in many patriarchal societies, norms of behaviour suggest that men can stare at women and not expect a similar response – a clear non-verbal expression of power relations. Yet men are not expected to stare at other men. Doing so risks 'an aggressive, "Who are you staring at" response' (Jeffreys 2015: 22). Taken individually, such cases may seem inconsequential, but collectively they help to reinforce patterns of gender inequality (Burgoon et al. 1996). As gender relations have become more equal and women routinely enter public spaces, the previously dominant male gaze is increasingly challenged and redefined as 'unwanted attention' and one form of everyday sexism.

There are other gender differences in non-verbal communication. Men tend to sit in more relaxed ways than women, leaning back with their legs apart, whereas women tend to have a more closed body position, sitting upright, with hands in their lap and legs crossed. Women tend to stand closer to the person they are talking to than men, while men make physical contact with women during conversation far more often than the other way around. Other studies have shown that women show their emotions more explicitly through facial expressions and seek and break eye contact more often than men.

These seemingly inconsequential, micro-level interactions reinforce wider macro-level inequalities. Men control more space when standing and sitting than women and also demonstrate control through more frequent physical contact. Women tend to seek approval through eye contact and facial expressions, but, when men make eye contact, a woman is more likely than another man to look away. In all these ways, non-verbal forms of communication provide subtle cues, which demonstrate men's power over women in the wider society (Young 1990).

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler argued that expressions of gendered identities illustrate that gender is mainly 'performative'. What does she mean by this? Butler says that many feminists have rejected the idea that gender is biologically or naturally fixed. But, in doing so, they separated gender (culture) from sex (biology), arguing that gendered norms of behaviour were built upon biologically determined male and female bodies. Butler rejects this position, arguing instead that there are *no* biologically determined identities lying beneath the cultural expressions of gender.

Gender identities are established precisely *through* their continuous performance. Hence, there is no essential, natural or biological basis to gender even though the belief that there is remains widespread. Butler's position is that gender identity is not a question of *who you are*, but *what you do*, and it therefore follows that gender identities are much more fluid and unstable than previously thought. This does not mean that people have an entirely free choice of gender identity, as performances involve regularized and repetitively produced gender norms that are enforced by prohibitions, ostracism and other forms of censure (Butler 1993). Yet, if Butler is right, there is more scope for people to make active choices on how they perform gender and thus to resist the dominant or hegemonic forms of gendered identity.

See chapter 7, 'Gender and Sexuality', for Connell's wider theory of hegemony in relation to gender and identity.

Embodiment and identities

The gendering of bodily experience and movement described above complements theories of gender identity, which are discussed in detail in chapter 14, 'The Life Course'. As that chapter shows, people *learn* gender roles and gendered behaviour from a very early age in interactions with significant others such as family members. What we can add to this from sociological work on bodily experience and non-verbal communication is that a person's gender identity is also expressed through experience of their own and other people's bodies and bodily movements. Thus gender identity is both socially created and 'embodied'. In fact, the general concept of identity has become central to many areas of sociology over recent years. But what is an identity?

Richard Jenkins (2008: 5) says that identity is 'the human capacity – rooted in language – to know "who's who" (and hence "what's what"). This involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on.' It follows that all identities are 'social identities' because they are formed in the continuing processes of interaction. Identities are made, not given, and as a result are fluid over time. Even so, they are experienced by the individual as essentially internally consistent and relatively stable (Scott 2015: 2). There are three key aspects of identities: they are partly individual or personal; they are partly collective or social; and they are always 'embodied'. As Jenkins (2008: 68) puts it:

Selves without bodies don't make much sense in human terms. Even ghosts or spirits, if we

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

12.1 Everyday sexism in public places

The study of small-scale face-to-face interactions and the study of social structures and institutions are inextricably connected (Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel 1981; Giddens 1984). For instance, Gardner (1995) found that, in various settings, unwanted attention, such as wolf-whistling and sexual comments from men, was frequently experienced by women as 'sexual harassment', a term that originated in the feminist movements of the 1970s. Such forms of harassment are typical of street talk and behaviour, and Gardner linked the harassment of women by men to the wider system of gender inequality, represented by male privilege in public spaces, women's physical vulnerability and the omnipresent threat of assault and rape.

Almost twenty years later, the Everyday Sexism Project (a UK web-based project that now includes books by Laura Bates (2014, 2018)) was created specifically to allow people to record their experiences of routine or mundane sexism

at work, in the street, while shopping, and so on. For instance, an anonymous poster – a lawyer – recorded that, after successfully defending a haulage company in court, the director of the company turned to her and said, 'Good girl'. Others report persistent and routine catcalls and sexual comments, such as 'I'd have some of that', made by men both on foot and from vehicles as they walk to work. The kinds of behaviour observed by Gardner in the mid-1990s continue in this century, though there is more awareness of their unacceptability.

Clearly, individual instances of verbal harassment must be related to shifting public norms and legal standards if they are to be properly understood. Understanding the link between micro and macro levels also shows that it is not enough to try to teach people good manners. To tackle the problem of sexual harassment also demands challenging gender inequality in all spheres of life.

"So far, so good. Now let's hear your wolf-whistling."

THINKING CRITICALLY

Read some of the individual cases of sexist behaviour from the Everyday Sexism website (link at the end of this chapter). It is relatively easy to link some of these to our own observations, but there has also been some movement in the direction of gender equality across society. What bodily postures, behavioural changes and non-verbal signs by both men and women have you witnessed that may evidence this shift towards increasing equality?

recognise them as human, once had bodies; even the disembodied world of cyberspace depends, in the not-so-final resort, on bodies in front of computer screens. We reach out with our selves and others reach out to us.

A good example of the close linkage between social identity and embodiment is Erving

Goffman's (1963) study of 'stigma'. Goffman shows how some disabled people, for example, can be stigmatized on the basis of observable physical impairments, which he calls 'discredited stigma', as this means a loss of control over the presentation of self and the management of individual identity. On

the other hand, some impairments that are not readily observable (such as epilepsy) can be more easily hidden from public view and therefore may allow the individual more control over the management of their identity. For this reason, Goffman calls this type of impairment a potentially 'discreditable stigma'.

Identities are also multi-layered, consisting of several sources, but a simple distinction can be made between *primary* and *secondary* identities, which are connected to the processes of primary and secondary socialization respectively. Primary identities are those formed in early life and include gender, race/ethnicity and perhaps also disability. Secondary identities build on these and include those associated with social roles and achieved statuses such as occupational roles and status positions. Social identities are quite complex and fluid, changing as people gain new roles or leave behind old ones.

An important consequence of the discussion so far is that identities mark out *similarities* and *differences*. Individual or personal identity makes one *feel* quite unique and different from other people, especially in individualized modern societies, and is perceived by others as such. Our personal names are one illustration of this individual difference. In many societies, parents increasingly seek out unusual names for their offspring to mark them out as different from the crowd, rather than choosing names linked to family or ones that are commonly used. For many people today, naming offspring is a matter of parental choice rather than an expression of family ties.

By contrast, collective identities display similarity. To identify yourself and be identified as part of an ethnic group, working class, an environmentalist or a professional sociologist can be a source of group solidarity, pride or perhaps even shame. But, whatever the perception we have of our social identity, Goffman's point holds: that individual and social identities are tightly bound together within the embodied self (Burkitt 1999).

THINKING CRITICALLY

List all of the various sources of your own identity, both individual and social. Try to rank these in order of their importance to your sense of personal identity. How has this ranking order changed over time? Why do you think some sources have become less significant for you while others have increased in significance? What conclusion do you draw about the balance between ascribed and achieved aspects of your identity?

Actors, stage-sets and complementary roles

Let us summarize what we have learned so far. Everyday interaction depends on subtle relationships between what we convey with our faces and bodies and what we express in words. We use the facial expressions and bodily gestures of other people to expand on what they communicate verbally and to check if they are sincere. But, as we shall see, we also organize our activities in the contexts of social life to achieve the same ends.

Encounters

In many social situations we engage in unfocused interaction with others. Unfocused interaction takes place whenever people exhibit mutual awareness of one another's presence. This is normally the case where large numbers of people assemble together, as on busy streets in cinemas or at parties. When people are in the presence of others they continually communicate non-verbally through their posture and facial and physical gestures.

Focused interaction occurs when individuals attend directly to what others say or do. Social interaction often involves both focused and unfocused exchanges. An instance of focused interaction is called an encounter, and much day-to-day life consists of encounters

with family, friends and colleagues, frequently occurring against the background of unfocused interaction with others who happen to be present. Small talk, seminar discussions, games and routine face-to-face contacts with ticket attendants and shop assistants are all examples of encounters.

Like conversations, encounters always need 'openings', which indicate that civil inattention is being discarded. When strangers meet and begin to talk, the moment of ceasing civil inattention is always risky, since misunderstandings can easily occur about the nature of the encounter (Goffman 1971). Hence making eye contact may at first be ambiguous and tentative. The person looking to make eye contact can then act as though they had made no direct move if the overture is not accepted. In focused interaction, each person communicates as much by facial expression and gestures as by

the words exchanged. Goffman distinguishes between the expressions individuals 'give' and those they 'give off'. The first are the words and facial expressions people use to produce certain impressions on others. The second are the clues that others may spot while checking their sincerity or truthfulness. For instance, a restaurant-owner listens with a polite smile to the statements that customers *give* about how much they enjoyed their meals. At the same time, she is noting the signals the customers *give off* – how pleased they seemed while eating, whether a lot was left over and the tone of voice used to express satisfaction.

Waiters and other service-sector workers are often told to smile and be polite in their interactions with customers. In a famous study of the airline industry, Arlie Hochschild (1989) describes this as a form of 'emotional labour' (see chapter 1).

12.2 Encountering 'dangerous persons'

Have you ever crossed to the other side of the street because you felt threatened by someone's demeanour? Elijah Anderson (1990) carried out research into this phenomenon in two adjacent urban neighbourhoods in the United States. He found that studying everyday life can shed light on how social order is constructed through the individual building blocks of micro-level interactions. Anderson was interested in understanding interactions where at least one party was viewed as threatening. He showed that the ways many black and white people interact with one another on the streets owed much to established racial stereotypes, which were linked to the economic structure of society. Once again, we see sociological work connecting micro interactions with the larger macro structures of society.

Anderson began by recalling Goffman's description of how social roles and statuses come into existence in particular contexts or locations. Goffman (1990 [1959]: 13) wrote that, 'When an individual enters the presence of others,

they commonly seek to acquire information about him or bring into play information already possessed. . . . Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and they may expect of him.'

But what behavioural cues and signs make up the vocabulary of public interaction that produces such expectations? Anderson found that factors such as skin colour, age, clothing and jewellery are all taken as identifying markers. Similarly, how fast people move and the type of movements they make build on these to create more coherent assumptions. But the time of day and who might be expected at that time may explain and therefore 'neutralize' worries about strangers. However, where strangers are not evaluated as 'safe', the alternative image of 'predator' may take over, and people act accordingly to avoid potential problems.

Anderson showed that those most likely to pass inspection do not fall into common

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stereotypes of the 'dangerous person'. Children and women come into this group, followed by white men, though more slowly. Black women come next, followed by black men and, finally, black male teenagers. By demonstrating that interactional tensions are linked to social status such as race, class and gender, this research shows that full understanding requires a grasp of macro- and micro-level processes. People are 'streetwise' when they develop skills such as 'the art of avoidance' to deal with fears of violence and crime.

The study shows how useful microsociology can be in highlighting how the broad institutional patterns in society operate in social life. It also

adds an important empirical dimension to large-scale structural theories of social inequalities, helping to ground them in everyday experience.

> **THINKING CRITICALLY**
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> Anderson's study was published in 1990. Have the categories of 'dangerous person' he described at that time now changed? Speculate on which social groups might fit this stereotype today. Explain how you would carry out a small pilot study to test out your ideas. Which research methods would prove most effective in addressing your research question?

Impression management

Interactionists such as Goffman often use concepts from the theatre in their studies. The concept of social role, for example, originated in a theatrical setting, from the 'rolled-up' scripts used by actors in ancient times. In sociology, roles are socially defined expectations that a person in a given status or social position follows. For example, to be a teacher is to hold a specific position; the teacher's role consists of acting in specified ways towards pupils, parents and other teachers. Goffman argues that social life is played out a little like actors perform on a stage, or, more accurately, on many stages, because how we act depends on the roles we are playing in particular situations and times.

People are sensitive to how they are seen by others and use many forms of impression management to shape the way others react to them. Although this may be done in calculated ways, usually it is without conscious intention. For instance, Don attends a business meeting wearing a suit and tie and is on his best behaviour, but later, when relaxing with friends at a football match, he changes to jeans and a sweatshirt and shares bawdy jokes with them. This is impression management. Indeed, Finkelstein (2002) argues that, in the West, there has long

been a perceived association between physical appearance and a person's underlying character. In today's consumer societies, the fashion industry provides a shifting landscape of clothing, cosmetics and other 'props' that can be used to adorn the body, conveying a desired self-image during interactions.

As we saw above, social roles are dependent on social status, and a person's social status often differs with the social context. As a 'student' you have a certain status and are expected to act in a certain ways in seminar rooms and lecture theatres. But, as a 'son' or 'daughter', you also have a different status from 'student' and expectations differ accordingly. Likewise, as a 'friend' you have yet another different position in the social order and another set of role expectations to meet. So people have many statuses at the same time, and this group of statuses is referred to as a status set.

Sociologists also distinguish between an ascribed and an achieved status. An ascribed status is one 'assigned' on biological grounds such as 'race', sex and age. Thus, your ascribed statuses could be 'white', 'female' and 'teenager'. An achieved status is one that is earned through an individual's own effort. Your achieved statuses could be 'graduate', 'athlete' and 'employee', for example. And while we may like to believe that our achieved statuses

Classic studies 12.1 Erving Goffman – 'all the world's (a bit like) a stage'

The research problem

Very often we watch people in public situations who seem to be 'performing' or 'playing to the crowd'. If we are honest, we would probably admit that we also treat the world a little like a stage at times, putting on a show for the benefit of others. But why do we do this? And, when we do, is it really us – our 'real selves' – doing the performing? If 'all the world's a stage', what happens *behind the scenes* of public performances? Erving Goffman (1922–82) studied this issue in several publications and research studies, producing the most detailed accounts of people's 'performances' and backstage behaviour.

Goffman's explanation

Much of social life, Goffman suggests, can be divided into front regions and back regions. Front regions are occasions or encounters in which individuals act out formal roles; they are essentially 'on-stage performances'. *Teamwork* is often involved in creating front-region performances. Politicians in the same party may put on a convincing show of unity and friendship for television cameras, even though, privately, they might detest each other. A wife and husband may take care to conceal their arguments from their children, preserving a front of harmony, only to fight bitterly once the children are safely in bed.

The back regions are where people assemble 'props' and prepare themselves for interaction in more formal settings. Back regions resemble the backstage of a theatre or the off-camera activities of filmmaking. When they are safely behind the scenes people can relax and give vent to feelings and behaviour they keep in check on stage. Back regions permit 'profanity, open sexual remarks, elaborate griping . . . rough informal dress, "sloppy" sitting and standing posture, use of dialect or substandard speech, mumbling and shouting, playful aggressiveness and "kidding," inconsiderateness for the other in minor but potentially symbolic acts, minor self-involvement such as humming, whistling, chewing, nibbling,

belching and flatulence' (Goffman 1990 [1959]: 129). Thus, a waitress may be efficient and courteous to a fault when serving customers but become loud and aggressive behind the swing doors of the kitchen.

Spencer Cahill's (1985) research team discovered what Goffman called 'performance teams', which retreated into public toilets to conceal embarrassment when their collective performance went wrong. Cahill describes a conversation between three young women in the toilets of a student centre on a university campus:

A: That was sooo embarrassing! I can't believe that just happened [*general laughter*].
B: He must think we are the biggest bunch of losers.
A: I can't believe I just screamed loud enough for everyone to hear.
C: It really wasn't all that loud. I'm sure he didn't hear you.
B: ——, we didn't see him right away, and I did try to tell you but you were so busy talking that I . . .
A: I can't believe that just happened. I feel like such an asshole.
B: Don't worry 'bout it. At least he knows who you are now. Are you ready?

Defensive strategies buy teams the time to gather themselves before going out to face the 'audience' again. Goffman argued that performance teams routinely use back regions for this purpose and discuss and rehearse the performance backstage before it actually takes place.

Goffman's approach is usually described as 'dramaturgical' – based on an analogy with the theatre. However, we have to bear in mind that this is an analogy. Goffman is *not* suggesting that the social world really *is* a stage, but that, using dramaturgical analysis, we can study certain aspects of it and learn more about why people behave as they do.

Critical points

Critics of Goffman's approach make some similar points to those levelled at other microsociologies,

Waiters usually take their breaks behind their restaurant to avoid being seen by customers and the public engaging in activities such as smoking and using bad language, which may break the spell of their on-stage performance.

namely that they do not have a theory of society and, despite acknowledging inequalities of class, gender and ethnicity in their accounts, they cannot explain how these developed or why they persist. The dramaturgical analogy can also be questioned. This may be a good model for studies

of organizations and 'total institutions' but may not be so useful elsewhere. Similarly, Goffman's theatrical analogy works best in modern Western societies which have developed a clearer division between the public and the private realms of life (front and back regions). But in other societies this division is either less pronounced or just does not exist in the same form, hence Goffman's perspective may not have quite the same purchase on life within these societies.

Contemporary significance

Goffman's work has had a profound influence on sociology as well as on numerous scholars who have been inspired to become professional sociologists after reading his work. He is widely acknowledged to have made some of the most thoughtful and stimulating contributions to the discipline. Many sociologists today still refer to his original works for examples of how to carry out microsociology, and the concepts he developed (stigma, master status, front and back region, and so on) have become part of the very fabric of sociology across a variety of fields. His work is discussed in chapter 14, 'The Life Course', chapter 10, 'Health, Illness and Disability', and chapter 22, 'Crime and Deviance'.

THINKING CRITICALLY

The idea of front and back regions has proved useful in many sociological studies, but, if all the world is a bit like a stage, are back regions also stages that require performances? Consider your own roles and what expectations exist in their backstage regions. In which roles or contexts can you be your 'authentic' self? What does your answer say about your personal and social identity?

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are more important, the rest of society may not agree. In any society some statuses have priority over all others and generally determine a person's overall position. Sociologists refer to this as a master status (Hughes 1945; Becker

1963). The most common master statuses are based on gender and ethnicity, and sociologists have shown that these are among the first things people notice about each other (Omi and Winant 1994).

Complementary roles: staging intimate examinations

Goffman's dramaturgical approach can be usefully applied to situations where 'actors' collaborate to accomplish specific outcomes. A good example is Henslin and Biggs's (1997 [1971]) study of the potentially embarrassing and delicate encounter between a female patient visiting a male gynaecologist. Henslin and Biggs analysed 12,000 to 14,000 examinations, collected by Biggs, who had trained as an obstetric nurse. In order for the interaction between patient and doctor to run smoothly, a 'dramaturgical desexualization' has to take place. That is, for the doctor to perform their highly specialized role and the patient to be comfortable and at ease during the examination, the patient's personality is effectively screened out via a series of 'scenes', leaving just 'a body'.

Adopting the dramaturgical metaphor, the pelvic examination moves through several discrete scenes during which the parts played by the actors change as the episode unfolds. In the prologue, the person enters the waiting room preparing to assume the role of patient. When called to the consulting room she adopts the 'patient' role and the first scene opens. The doctor assumes a business-like, professional manner and treats the patient as a proper and competent person, maintaining eye contact and listening politely to what she has to say. If he decides an examination is called for, he tells her so and leaves the room – scene one closes.

At that time, a female nurse would then enter; she is an important stagehand for the main scene, soothing the patient's worries, acting as both confidante – knowing the 'things women have to put up with' – and collaborator in what is to follow. The nurse helps to transform the woman from a person to a body, supervising the patient's undressing. She takes the patient's clothes, folds them and makes sure the underwear is out of sight when the doctor returns, as most women feel this is a private matter. The nurse then guides the patient to the examining table and covers most of her body with a sheet before the physician returns.

The central scene opens with the nurse and doctor taking part. The presence of the nurse helps ensure the interaction between doctor and patient is free of sexual overtones and the examination proceeds as though the personality of the patient were absent. The drape sheet separates the genital area from the rest of the body, and, apart from specific medical queries, the doctor ignores the patient, sitting out of her line of vision. The patient collaborates in becoming a temporary non-person, not initiating conversation and keeping movement to a minimum.

In Saudi Arabia, interactions between men and women are highly regulated and intimate contact in public is forbidden. Yet in medical settings other social rules take precedence, although these are still carefully managed.

In the interval between this and the final scene, the nurse again plays the role of stagehand, helping the patient to become a full person once more. After the doctor has left the room, the two may engage in conversation. Having dressed and regroomed herself, the patient is ready to enter the final scene. The doctor re-enters the room and discusses the results, treating the patient as a complete and responsible person again. The epilogue is played out when she leaves the surgery, taking up her identity in the outside world having played her part in the management of a potentially tricky interaction.

> See chapter 10, 'Health, Illness and Disability', for a discussion of functionalist ideas on doctor–patient relations and the 'sick role'.

Desexualizing the body in public places

Intimate medical examinations offer just one example of difficult social situations involving the human body. Sociological studies have recently explored the 'negotiated order' of the public swimming pool and the 'hot-tub culture', both of which present issues of the presentation of the body. In the context of public swimming pools and hot tubs, people 'present' their near naked bodies in close proximity to others, creating the risk of encounters being perceived as sexual. Hence, these interaction sites are constructed or organized as desexualized arenas, while rules and rituals have evolved which guide acceptable performances (Scott 2009, 2010). For example, swimmers try to avoid eye contact and strive to respect the varied 'disciplinary regimes' adopted by other people. It is also important that individual swimmers are aware of the rules of acceptable personal space and do not routinely breach them by encroaching on the space of others.

Over the last two decades the hot tub has become popular in many developed countries, either alongside or as a replacement for the public swimming pool. Many hotels and private homes also have an indoor or outdoor hot tub, and tubs are now an accepted part of community life. The hot tub, though, is a smaller social site than the large public swimming pool, and the rules and 'aquatic rituals' that govern interactions can be stricter. In a study of outdoor hot tub use in Iceland, Jónsson (2010: 247) notes that 'minimal touching' is key:

> You do not greet each other with a handshake; a nod is sufficient; hot tub conversations are general and impersonal, even between regular visitors . . . Personal questions are not allowed. In some cases pool-goers have frequented the tubs over several years without uttering a single word. Discussions with foreigners rarely surpass the 'How-do-you-like-Iceland' barrier.

There are likely to be variations in hot-tub rituals across cultures. Where tubs have been installed in private homes and become part of 'normal' family life, public conversational and physical norms may not apply.

What both examples illustrate is the way that exposed human bodies pose problems of sexual propriety in public encounters that are dealt with by social rules, rituals and performances. Central to these interaction rituals is the maintenance of the correct personal space, or what some have referred to as the 'bubble', surrounding an individual.

Personal space

There are cultural differences in the definition of personal space. In Western culture, people usually maintain a distance of at least 3 feet when engaged in focused interaction with others; when positioned side by side, they may stand more closely together. In the Middle East, people often stand closer to one another than is thought acceptable in the West. Westerners visiting that part of the world are likely to find themselves disconcerted by this unexpected physical proximity.

Edward T. Hall (1969, 1973), who worked extensively on non-verbal communication, distinguishes four zones of personal space. *Intimate distance*, of up to 1.5 feet, is reserved

for very few social contacts. Only those involved in relationships in which regular bodily touching is permitted, such as lovers or parents and children, operate within this zone of private space. *Personal distance*, from 1.5 to 4 feet, is the normal spacing for encounters with friends and close acquaintants. Some intimacy of contact is permitted, but this tends to be strictly limited. *Social distance*, from 4 to 12 feet, is the zone usually maintained in formal settings such as interviews. The fourth zone is that of *public distance*, beyond 12 feet, preserved by those who are performing to an audience.

In ordinary interaction, the most fraught zones are those of intimate and personal distance. If these zones are invaded, people try to recapture their space. We may stare at the intruder, as if to say, 'Move away!', or elbow them aside. When people are forced into proximity closer than they deem desirable, they might create a kind of physical boundary. A reader at a crowded library desk might physically demarcate a private space by stacking books around its edges.

Gender issues also play a role here. Men have traditionally enjoyed greater freedom than women in the use of space, including movement into the personal space of women who may not be intimates or even close acquaintances. A man who guides a woman by the arm when they walk together, or who places a hand on her lower back when showing her through a door, may be doing so as a gesture of friendly care or politeness. The reverse phenomenon, however - a woman entering a man's personal space - is often construed as flirtation. New laws and standards regarding sexual harassment in many Western countries seek to protect people - men, women and, increasingly, children - from unwanted touching or contact by others in their personal space.

The rules of social interaction

Although we routinely use non-verbal cues in our own behaviour and in making sense of the behaviour of others, interactions mostly involve talk - casual verbal exchange - carried on in conversation with others. Sociologists, especially symbolic interactionists, have always accepted that language is fundamental to social life. In the late 1960s, however, an approach was devised that is specifically concerned with how people use language in the ordinary contexts of daily life.

Harold Garfinkel (discussed in 'Classic studies' 12.2) coined the term 'ethnomethodology'. Ethnomethodology is the study of 'ethno-methods' - the folk or lay methods people use to *make sense* of what others do and particularly of what they say. We all apply these methods, normally without paying conscious attention to them. Often we can make sense of what is said in conversation only if we know the social context, which does not appear in the words themselves.

See if you can understand what is going on in this simple conversation (Heritage 1984: 237):

> A: I have a fourteen-year-old son.
> B: Well, that's all right.
> A: I also have a dog.
> B: Oh, I'm sorry.

What if you were told that this is a conversation between a prospective tenant and a landlord? The conversation then becomes sensible: some landlords accept children but not pets. Yet, if we do not know the social context, the responses of individual B seem to bear no relation to the statements of A. *Part* of the sense is in the words but *part* is in the way that meaning emerges from the social context.

Shared understandings

The most inconsequential forms of everyday talk assume complicated shared understandings and knowledge, and meaning does not belong to the individual but is produced in the interaction process. Meanings are entirely capable of being communicated to others and are widely shared (Dennis et al. 2013: 15). In fact, small talk is very complex, as words used in ordinary talk do not always have precise meanings, and we 'fix' what we want to say through the unstated assumptions that underlie it. If Maria asks Tom:

Classic studies 12.2 **Harold Garfinkel's experiments in ethnomethodology**

The research problem

Misunderstandings are commonplace in social life. Sometimes they go unresolved, but they can also provoke irritation and frustration. Anyone who has been told, 'Listen when I'm talking to you', will be aware of how quickly apparently trivial misunderstandings can escalate into anger and aggression. But why do people get so upset when the minor conventions of talk are not followed? Garfinkel (1917–2011) investigated this issue with some of his students.

Garfinkel's explanation

For a smooth-running everyday existence, people must be able to take for granted certain aspects of their lives. These 'background expectancies' include the organization of ordinary conversations, such as knowing when and when not to speak, what we can assume without formally stating it, and so on. Garfinkel (1963) explored unspoken assumptions with student volunteers who set out to 'breach' the conventions of daily life. Students were asked to engage a friend or relative in conversation and to insist that casual remarks or general comments be actively pursued to make their meaning more precise. So, if someone said, 'Have a nice day', the student responded, 'Nice in what sense, exactly?' Part of one of these exchanges (cited in Heritage 1984: 80) ran as follows (E is the student volunteer, S is their husband, and they are watching television):

> S: All these old movies have the same kind of old iron bedstead in them.
> E: What do you mean? Do you mean all old movies or some of them, or just the ones you've seen?
> S: What's the matter with you? You know what I mean.
> E: I wish you would be more specific.
> S: You know what I mean! Drop dead!

Why would a friend or relative get upset so quickly? Garfinkel's answer is that the stability and meaningfulness of daily life depend on the sharing of unstated assumptions about what is said and why. If we were not able to take these for granted, meaningful communication would be almost impossible. Any question or contribution to a conversation would have to be followed by a massive 'search procedure' of the sort Garfinkel's students were told to initiate, and interaction would break down. What seem at first sight to be unimportant conventions of talk turn out to be fundamental to the fabric of social life, which is why their breach is so serious.

In daily life, people sometimes deliberately feign ignorance of unstated knowledge. This may be done to rebuff others, poke fun at them, cause embarrassment or call attention to a double meaning. Consider, for example, this all too typical exchange between parent (P) and teenager (T):

> P: Where are you going?
> T: Out.
> P: What are you going to do?
> T: Nothing.

The responses of the teenager are the opposite of those of the student volunteers above. Rather than pursuing enquiries where this is not normally done, the teenager provides no appropriate answers at all – essentially saying, 'Mind your own business'.

The first question might elicit a different response from another person in another context:

> A: Where are you going?
> B: I'm going quietly round the bend.

B deliberately misreads A's question in order ironically to convey worry or frustration. Comedy and jokes thrive on such deliberate misunderstandings of the unstated assumptions involved in talk. There is nothing threatening about this as long as the parties concerned recognize that the intent is to provoke laughter.

By delving into the everyday world, Garfinkel shows that the normal, smooth-running social order that other sociologists simply take for granted is in fact a social process of interaction that must be continually reproduced every

day. Social order is hard work! However, in his 'breaching experiments', Garfinkel was also able to demonstrate just how robust the fabric of daily life is. Students were able to explain and apologize to their friends and families once the experiment was over, but what might have happened had they carried on in such pedantic and uncooperative ways? Would they have been referred to a doctor or sent to a psychiatrist as suffering from mental illness? Social reality may be socially constructed, but it is a construction that is impossible to ignore.

Critical points

Given that ethnomethodology set out to criticize mainstream sociology and is usually seen as an alternative to it, it is unsurprising that it has been subject to much criticism. We can only note the most important points. First, ethnomethodology seeks to understand the world from the viewpoint of 'ordinary actors'. While this may bring about useful insights, critics argue that it leaves ethnomethodological findings open to the charge of subjectivism – they apply only to the particular subjects being studied. Second, the focus on micro-level order and disorder leaves ethnomethodology remarkably detached from the key structural determinants affecting people's

life chances, such as gender, race/ethnicity and social class. Ethnomethodology's aversion to social structural analysis and general theories of society seems to leave its studies cast adrift from crucial questions about power and the structuring of social life. Finally, ethnomethodology does not look for the causes of social phenomena but seeks to describe how they are experienced and made sense of. Again, many sociologists see this lack of causal explanation as a major problem which essentially rules out the idea that the study of social life could ever be 'scientific'.

Contemporary significance

Ethnomethodology is an important approach to the study of daily life and social interaction which is usually seen alongside other microsociologies, such as phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Sociologists who are interested in large-scale social structures, power relations, the international system of nation-states and long-term socio-historical change will always find ethnomethodology disappointing. But, taken on its own terms, this approach has produced much insightful work showing how people constitute, reproduce and make sense of their world.

'What did you do yesterday?', there is no obvious answer suggested by the words in the question. A day is a long time. It would be logical for Tom to say: 'Well, at 7.16, I woke up. At 7.18, I got out of bed, went to the bathroom and started to brush my teeth. At 7.19, I turned on the shower . . .' We understand the response the question calls for only by knowing Maria, what sort of activities she and Tom consider relevant, and what Tom usually does on a particular day of the week, among other things.

Interactional vandalism

We have seen that conversations are one of the main ways in which our daily lives are maintained in a stable and coherent manner. We feel most comfortable when the tacit conventions of small talk are adhered to, but when they are

breached we can feel threatened, confused and insecure. In most everyday talk, conversants are carefully attuned to the cues given by others, such as changes in intonation, slight pauses or gestures, in order to facilitate smooth conversation. By being mutually aware, conversants 'cooperate' in opening and closing interactions and in taking turns to speak. Interactions in which one party is conversationally 'uncooperative' can give rise to tensions.

Garfinkel's students intentionally created tense situations by undermining conversational rules as part of their sociological experiments. But what about real-world situations in which people 'make trouble' through conversational practices? One 1990s American study investigated verbal interchanges between pedestrians and street people in New York City to understand why passers-by find such interactions problematic.

We have all come across people we consider to be 'rude'. By identifying some people as rude we inevitably compare them to ourselves – the non-rude folks. But are there really people who are rude by nature? Susie Scott (2015: 44–8) recounts the single case of an encounter in 2013 between a shopper and a cashier in the UK that received much media attention.

A customer arrived at the checkout of a supermarket in south-east London and continued to talk on her mobile phone. The cashier interpreted this behaviour as rude and refused to serve her, and the ensuing row made media headlines. Scott argues that the cashier's interpretation was that she was a participant in a focused encounter and, by continuing her

phone conversation, the customer failed to acknowledge her, instead treating her as a 'non-person'. Yet the customer also believed that *she* held the moral high ground, as the cashier had been rude to her by refusing to perform the role and serve her. The encounter illustrates a general point that it is through breaches of the interaction order that the rules of interaction become visible at all. But who was the 'rude person' in this exchange?

From an interactionist perspective, we can better understand this situation if we see 'rudeness' as an emergent property of social situations, not as a personal characteristic of certain individuals. Rudeness can be reformulated as a type of incivility that arises out

The rules of mobile phone use during public performances such as theatre plays, if others aren't disturbed, are still evolving, though stage actors are increasingly calling out audience members for 'rudeness' when messaging during performances.

of interactions in which actors or audiences define it as such. As Scott (2015: 46) says, 'Nobody likes to think of themselves as a rude person . . . and it is much easier to regard ourselves as upholders of social morality, whilst being quick to indignantly ascribe rudeness to others.' In this sense we all have the capacity to be rude, and to have our actions defined as 'rude' by others, in spite of our strongly held view that we are just not 'rude people'.

> **THINKING CRITICALLY**
>
> Think of a time when you or someone you know were described as being rude by other people, perhaps while queueing, travelling or in conversation with friends. Reconstruct the development of that encounter and explain why the behaviour may have been perceived as rude. Did you consider that it was rudeness at the time? With hindsight, do you now believe that it was rude? Is rudeness functional for social life, and, if so, how?

The researchers used conversation analysis to compare a selection of street interchanges with samples of everyday talk. Conversation analysis is a methodology that examines all facets of a conversation for meaning – from the smallest filler words (such as 'er', 'um' and 'ah') to the precise timing of interchanges, including pauses, interruptions and overlaps.

The study looked at interactions between black men – many of whom were homeless, alcoholic or drug addicts – and white women who passed by on the street. The men tried to initiate conversations with passing women by calling out or paying them compliments or asking them questions. But something 'goes wrong' in these attempted conversations, because the women rarely responded. The text below is an attempt by 'Mudrick', a black man in his late fifties, to engage women in conversation (Duneier and Molotch 1999: 1273–4):

> [Mudrick] begins this interaction as a white woman (who looks about 25 years old) approaches at a steady pace:
> 1 MUDRICK: I love you baby.
>   *She crosses her arms and quickens her walk, ignoring the comment.*
> 2 MUDRICK: Marry me.
>   *Next, it is two white women, also probably in their mid-twenties:*
> 3 MUDRICK: Hi girls, you all look very nice today. You have some money? Buy some books.
>   *They ignore him. Next, it is a young black woman:*

> 4 MUDRICK: Hey pretty. Hey pretty.
>   *She keeps walking without acknowledging him.*
> 5 MUDRICK: 'Scuse me. 'Scuse me. I know you hear me.
>   *Then he addresses a white woman in her thirties:*
> 6 MUDRICK: I'm watching you. You look nice, you know.
>   *She ignores him.*

Negotiating smooth 'openings' and 'closings' to conversations is a fundamental requirement for urban civility, but when women resisted the men's attempts at opening conversations, the men ignored them and persisted. Similarly, if the men succeeded in opening a conversation, they often refused to respond to cues from the women to close it, as happens here:

> 1 MUDRICK: Hey pretty.
> 2 WOMAN: Hi how you doin'.
> 3 MUDRICK: You alright?
> 4 MUDRICK: You look very nice you know. I like how you have your hair pinned.
> 5 MUDRICK: You married?
> 6 WOMAN: Yeah.
> 7 MUDRICK: Huh?
> 8 WOMAN: Yeah.
> 9 MUDRICK: Where the rings at?
> 10 WOMAN: I have it home.
> 11 MUDRICK: Y'have it home?
> 12 WOMAN: Yeah.
> 13 MUDRICK: Can I get your name?
> 14 MUDRICK: My name is Mudrick, what's yours?

> *She does not answer and walks on.*
> (Duneier and Molotch 1999: 1274)

In this instance, Mudrick made nine out of the fourteen utterances in the interaction to initiate the conversation and elicit further responses from the woman. From the transcript it is evident that the woman is not interested in talking, but, when conversation analysis is applied to the tape recording, her reluctance becomes even clearer. She delays all her responses and, when she does respond, Mudrick replies immediately, his comments sometimes overlapping hers. Timing in conversations is a precise indicator; delaying a response by just a fraction of a second is adequate to signal a desire to change the course of a conversation. By ignoring the tacit rules, Mudrick was 'technically rude'. In return, the woman was also 'technically rude' in ignoring his repeated attempts to engage her in talk, and it is this aspect that made the interactions problematic for passers-by. When standard cues for opening and closing conversations are not adhered to, people can feel profoundly insecure.

The term interactional vandalism describes cases like these, in which a subordinate person breaks the tacit rules of interaction that are of value to the more powerful (Duneier and Molotch 1999). The men on the street often conformed to norms of speech in their interactions with one another, local shopkeepers, the police, relatives and acquaintances. But, when they chose to, they subverted the conventions, leaving passers-by disoriented and unable to articulate what had happened.

This study of interactional vandalism is another example of the link between micro-level interactions and forces operating at the macro level. To the black men on the street, the white women who ignored them were distant and bereft of sympathy and hence legitimate 'targets'. The women often took the men's behaviour as proof that they were indeed dangerous and best avoided. Interactional vandalism is closely tied in with overarching class, gender and racial structures. The fear and anxiety generated in such interactions help to constitute the outside statuses and forces that, in turn, influence the interactions themselves.

Response cries

Some kinds of utterance are not really 'talk' but muttered exclamations, or what Goffman (1981) calls response cries. For instance, when Marsha exclaims, 'Oops!', after knocking over a glass of water, 'Oops!' seems to be an uninteresting reflex response to a mishap, rather like blinking your eye when a person moves a hand sharply towards your face. But the fact that people do not usually make the exclamation when they are alone shows it is not just a reflex. 'Oops!' is a response cry normally directed towards other people. The exclamation demonstrates to others that the lapse is minor and momentary, not something that should cast doubt on Marsha's command of her actions.

'Oops!' is used for minor failures, not major accidents or calamities, which demonstrates that it is part of our controlled management of the details of social life. Moreover, the exclamation may be used by someone observing Marsha rather than Marsha herself. 'Oops!' is normally a curt sound, but the 'oo' may be prolonged in some situations. Someone might extend the sound to cover a critical moment when performing a task. A parent may utter an extended 'Oops!' or 'Oopsadaisy!' when playfully tossing a child in the air. The sound covers that brief phase when the child might feel a loss of control, reassuring them and at the same time developing their understanding of response cries.

This may all sound contrived and exaggerated. Surely we do not pay as much attention to what we say as this example suggests? Of course not, at least not on a conscious level. But we all take for granted this immensely complicated, continuous control of our appearance and actions. In interactions we are never just 'present'. Others expect as we expect of them, that we will display what Goffman calls 'controlled alertness' – a demonstration to others that we are competent in the routines of daily life.

The strength of the tacit rules of interaction is so strong that innocent deviations from the rules respecting personal space can be surprisingly embarrassing.
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Interaction in time and space

The previous section introduced some important aspects of the implicit rules pervading routine, everyday interactions. However, all our actions are distributed in time and space, and all interaction is situated, occurring in a particular place and time. Kim (2012) used participant observation to study the behaviour of people riding Greyhound buses in the USA and spending time in bus terminals over a two-year period. In particular, she sought to explain why and how people avoid interacting with others in these places.

The longer Greyhound journeys can last anywhere between eight and seventy-two hours, and passengers tend to be strangers. Interactions do occur, but these are brief as, for most, strangers are suspect and time is best spent

looking after belongings and trying to put off others from taking the adjoining seat. Travellers adopt all sorts of behaviour to appear busy or uninterested – using mobile phones, checking bags, exploring the contents of wallets, staring out of windows, and sleeping or pretending to sleep. Kim calls this intentional avoidance of interaction 'non-social transient behaviour'. While civil inattention acknowledges and respects the presence of others, non-social transient behaviour aims at 'invisibility' and does not respect or acknowledge the presence of others. Nonetheless, the actors are still engaged in giving a performance, one which effectively says to others, 'Leave me alone' or 'I don't want to be bothered'.

Kim argues that these performances occur primarily in enclosed spaces where people are

forced to spend long periods of time together. However, they also take place in other non-social transient spaces perceived as potentially dangerous, such as nightclubs, pop concerts, sports venues and high-crime areas. One reason why people adopt non-social transient behaviour on long bus journeys is to protect themselves from possible thefts and physical attack. It is uncommon, for instance, for passengers to ask others to 'keep an eye on' their bags, as fellow passengers are also potentially suspect. A second reason is the expectation of delays and subsequent aggravation. Delays themselves do not routinely lead to complaints but, rather, to intensified disengagement and silence. Finally, passengers experience physical and psychological exhaustion on such long trips, and the rule is to keep conversations to a minimum and not to bother others unnecessarily. Kim's (2012: 9) central argument is that, in non-social transient spaces, there exists a set of norms and behavioural rules which new commuters learn in order to 'become non-social'.

The internet is another good example of how closely forms of social life are bound up with the control of space and time, making it possible for us, in any corner of the world, to interact with people we never see or meet. Such technological change 'rearranges' space – we can interact with anyone without moving. It also alters our experience of time, because communication is almost immediate. Until the advent of the internet, most communication across space required a long duration of time. If a letter was sent abroad, there was a time gap while the letter was carried by ship, train, truck or plane to its destination. People do still write letters by hand, but instantaneous communication has become basic to the social world, and we look at this developing environment next.

Interaction norms for the digital age

The rapid growth and use of information communications technology (ICT) is both startling and a genuinely global phenomenon,

though there are significant disparities between the developed and some developing countries (see chapter 19, 'The Media', for more on this subject). By the end of 2018, an estimated 3.9 billion people used the internet, over half of the global population, and 60 per cent accessed the internet at home (ITU 2018: 2). In 2017 almost everyone in the world had access to a mobile network signal, and mobile broadband subscriptions reached in excess of 4 billion. Young people aged fifteen to twenty-four lead internet adoption and usage, and around 830 million were online in 2017 (ITU 2017). What will be the impact of these digital technologies on the life of individuals and societies?

Interaction and communication at a distance

ICT devices are spreading rapidly and have increasingly been integrated into people's everyday routines, both at home and at work (Kraut et al. 2006). This is the conclusion from a 2007 MTV Networks/Nickelodeon survey of 18,000 young people aged eight to twenty-four across sixteen countries, including China, Japan, the UK, the USA, Canada and Mexico. The survey found that 'Young people don't see "tech" as a separate entity – it's an organic part of their lives. . . . Talking to them about the role of technology in their lifestyle would be like talking to kids in the 1980s about the role the park swing or the telephone played in their social lives – it's invisible' (Reuters 2007).

But how do people communicate and interact with each other using smartphones, the internet, email and social media sites? Chambers (2006) investigated the thesis that the fairly stable and fixed ties of family, neighbourly relations and community were giving way to more voluntaristic, fluid ties (Putnam 2000). She concluded that new patterns of association and social bonds are emerging based around ideals of 'friendship', many of which are sustained through ICT networks. She also argues that other forms are forged through new social identities among previously marginalized groups, such as those within 'queer communities', resulting in safe

spaces for the exploration of 'self' and identities. Yet ICTs also bring with them potentially new problems, such as cyberbullying and financial fraud.

Chambers notes that, in spite of their positive aspects, social media may not provide an adequate basis for ensuring relationships of care and caring, most of which do need regular face-to-face contact and long-term commitment. Many schools and parents are also concerned about social networking and smartphones in relation to fears about online grooming and the abuse of children by adults. Such fears are not entirely unfounded. One social networking site, MySpace, admitted in 2007 that it had found more than 29,000 registered sex offenders among its 180 million members worldwide (Johnson 2007). Although this is a very small proportion of the overall membership, it is clear that the fast-changing and relatively anonymous online environment presents new problems.

> Friendship and relationships are discussed in more detail in chapter 15, 'Families and Intimate Relationships'.

Many of today's affiliations are created through the internet or other forms of mobile communication, but how will these trends affect the quality of social relationships? For almost all of human history, people interacted face to face with others who were close at hand. Although letters, the telegraph and telephone have all been around for some time, the internet enables 'interaction at a distance' in much more transformative ways. For instance, Skype enables (almost) real-time 'face-to-face' interactions between people who may be thousands of miles apart. The digital revolution could provide a renewed sense of sociality and personal intimacy for some, but it could also spell isolation and social distance for others. What seems clear is that people are already fitting digital media into their everyday routines alongside existing face-to-face relationships.

Netiquette or 'cybermanners'

As we have seen, online communication and interactions present both dangers and opportunities, and sociological studies explore the developing contours of cyberspace. Some have suggested that, rather than seeing online life as a distinct realm of human experience, it may be more accurate to view it as an extension of the physical social world. For instance, on social media sites, most people interact mainly with friends, relations and people they already know from face-to-face contact (Holmes 2011). Other Facebook 'friends' or 'followers' on Twitter are likely to be kept at a distance. As Baym (2015: 6) argues, we should not see 'cyberspace' as an inauthentic realm set apart from the authentic 'real world' of face-to-face or body-to-body interaction, because 'online and offline flow together in the life-worlds of contemporary relationships.'

With the advent of the 'second generation' of more interactive online services – often referred to as 'Web 2.0' – more people can share information and actually contribute to web-based content. One prominent and widely used example of this is the online encyclopaedia *Wikipedia*, which allows users to add content, to debate the veracity of entries with others, and effectively to become co-authors. The worldwide web can also be viewed on many more mobile internet devices, including mobile phones, laptop computers and tablets, thus integrating the internet into more aspects of daily life (Beer and Burrows 2007; see chapter 19, 'The Media'). There is a blurring of the boundary between the private and the public as, for instance, people 'tweet' about their everyday activities and movements and include private details such as their location, gender, relationship status, and so on, in their social media profiles. Online communication has led to the emergence of norms and rules governing interactions and exchanges – often described as netiquette – and there are now many sources of information on how people *should* behave in their online communications (Chiles 2013).

Etiquette guides to interaction on social media advise that, although these are similar

to 'real life', it is important to appreciate that anyone can become a 'friend'. Some guides suggest 'friending' only those people one already knows, while others argue that it is good to accept strangers, who can then be dropped or 'defriended' later if necessary. One etiquette guide to Facebook (Weinberg 2008) advises: 'don't add users as "friends" without proper introductions, be honest about your real identity and don't publicize a private conversation on a "wall" (publicly open) post.' The same guide reminds us to 'Think about the consequences of your engagement on any social site . . . Consider how your comments would be perceived before you actually post them, and think about logic above emotion at all times.' Another guide tells Twitter users, 'It is not required for you to follow people who have chosen to follow you (although doing so in return can be seen as a polite gesture). However, it is important to acknowledge them when they reply to or retweet one of your public services' (Steinberg and Brown 2013).

Given the nature of web-based services, which are open to user-driven change, online manners codes are likely to continue developing along with the technology. At present, netiquette appears to be based largely on attempts to translate existing norms of behaviour and codes of manners into a format which is appropriate online, rather than creating an entirely novel system. For example, a survey of netiquette advice by Holmes (2011) found that, as in 'the real world', social status differences between employee and employer or teachers and students were seen as problematic and potentially embarrassing. Similarly, social divisions of class and ethnicity were seen as needing careful handling.

If online etiquette is a variant of social etiquette, then mainstream sociological theories and concepts should still be useful. For instance, the concept of 'role conflict' helps to makes sense of this situation as users attempt to manage their different roles in relation to the different 'faces' they present to others. This becomes increasingly difficult on social media, where information is potentially open to all

of these various audiences at the same time. How many workers would be comfortable to find that their boss was a Facebook 'friend' or Twitter 'follower', for example? Keeping separate the various roles an individual plays and the faces they present seems to be becoming more complex. This conclusion is consistent with the view that the internet is an extension and part of the social world, not a clean break from it. This is evident from a brief look at how 'trust' is built and managed online.

Building trust online

Many everyday transactions, such as buying groceries, making a bank deposit or paying a utility bill, bring us into *indirect contact* with strangers. Anyone who has phoned a bank and been put through to an anonymous call centre thousands of miles away has experienced this phenomenon. Now that email, text messaging, instant messaging, online communities, chatrooms and social media have become widely integrated into everyday life, there is a growing interest in understanding their impact and the norms of online conduct that are emerging (Baym 2015).

There has long been a polarization in debates on the possibilities and dangers of the internet. For sceptics, internet communication, often referred to as computer mediated communication (CMC), generates new problems that are just not found in face-to-face social interactions. As Katz et al. (2001:407) put it: 'To type is not to be human, to be in cyberspace is not to be real; all is pretence and alienation, a poor substitute for the real thing.' In particular, proponents of this view argue that CMC technology is unable to prevent users from hiding behind false identities, which allow trickery, fraud, bullying, manipulation, emotional swindles and the sexual grooming of children. The result is the gradual erosion of mutual trust, not only in online environments but spreading into the wider society too. Turkle (2017: 11–12) argues that online communication appears to promote connectedness, but this may be illusory: 'After an evening of avatar to avatar talk in a networked game, we feel, at one

moment, in possession of a full social life and, in the next, curiously isolated, in tenuous complicity with strangers.' Online environments lead to reduced expectations of the people with whom we connect and, consequently, denuded relations in the material social world.

On the other hand, internet enthusiasts argue that online interaction has some advantages over conventional forms. Physical co-presence may enable the display of a wider range of emotions and subtle changes of meaning, but it also conveys information about the speaker's age, gender, ethnicity and social position that

may be used to stigmatize and discriminate. Electronic communication masks most or all of these identifying markers, ensuring that attention focuses strictly on the content of the message. This can be a great advantage for minority ethnic groups, women and other traditionally disadvantaged groups whose opinions have been devalued in public situations (Locke and Pascoe 2000).

Optimists argue that internet users also tend to communicate with others via conventional means, such as phone or face to face, more than do non-users. Hence, far from increasing

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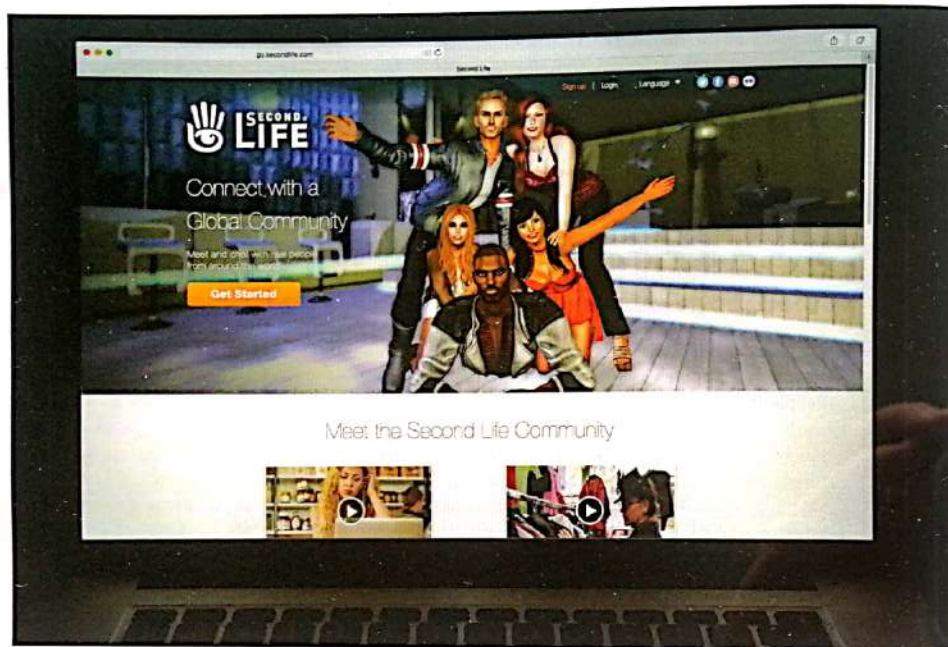**Global society 12.1** **The creation and maintenance of 'e-trust'**

Public debate on internet security has tended to focus on issues of online banking fraud, the use of false identities, and the problems associated with children using chatrooms that may be monitored by predatory paedophiles. Such worries make people fearful and erode trust in the online environment. In successful social interactions of all kinds, trust is a key component. According to Cook and her colleagues (2009: 1), 'Trust facilitates social interaction. When it exists, it strengthens cooperation, provides the basis for risk-taking, and grants latitude to the parties involved. When it does not exist, various mechanisms are required to protect against exploitation.' This is particularly evident in transactions between people who are not co-present. Such indirect and geographically distant transactions are potentially problematic because none of the usual gestures, body language or non-verbal cues is in play, which deprives both parties of crucial elements by which each can satisfy themselves as to the sincerity of the other party.

The largest and most well-established internet auction house is eBay. It is difficult to establish how many people earn most of their income from eBay, but in 2006 it was estimated that some 165,000 Americans alone were making a living primarily from selling on the site (Epley et al. 2006). Launched in 1995, eBay quickly attracted more than 100 million people around the world, even though it can offer no guarantees for any goods

sold. Buyers and sellers take on all the risks. Yet though we might expect this arrangement to be open to large-scale fraud and deceit, in fact the default rate for transactions on eBay is remarkably small.

One reason for this is eBay's 'reputation management system', which effectively replaces face-to-face interactional cues (Kollock 1999; Resnick et al. 2006). The eBay system asks buyers and sellers to rate each other – positive, negative or neutral, though short comments can also be added. Online reputation management systems have been described as the cyber equivalent of 'gossip' in social life, as people's views of one another are both encouraged and widely shared. But, unlike gossip, which tends to be localized and restricted within community boundaries, online systems potentially involve millions of people across the world, and the impact of gaining a bad reputation can be serious for both traders and buyers (Lev-On 2009).

Over time, reputations are established which means eBay users are able to compare and contrast traders in order to minimize the risks they take online. In sum, e-trust in the online eBay auction house, and others which use similar systems, is produced through a form of community self-policing. However, from a trader's perspective, the feedback system also offers an online version of impression management and self-presentation.

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social isolation and destroying trust, email, blogging, chatrooms and social media present new opportunities for communication and friendship building. Electronic interactions can be experienced as liberating and empowering, since people can create online identities and speak more freely than they would elsewhere (Katz et al. 2001).

Conclusion: a need or no need for proximity?

Despite the rise in indirect communication, it seems that humans still value direct contact. People in business continue to fly around the world to attend meetings when it would be much cheaper, more efficient and more environmentally friendly to use conference calls, Skype or video links. Family members could arrange 'virtual' reunions or holiday gatherings using electronic real-time communications, but would they really match the warmth and intimacy of face-to-face celebrations? The Covid-19 pandemic of 2019-20 was notable for the way that people under severe forms of physical and geographical restrictions made use of online communications to maintain social contact with friends and family. Email, social media, video conferencing apps and lots more enabled people to stay in touch during a very difficult and extended period of time. Yet, for most people, digital forms of communication could not match physical contact. People reported a longing to be able to hug their grandchildren, congregate together in social groups, and even to do something as simple as shake hands.

Boden and Molotch (1994) studied what they call the compulsion to proximity: the need of individuals to meet with one another in situations of co-presence. People prefer this, they suggest, because co-presence supplies much richer information about other people's sincerity than any form of electronic communication. Only by being in the physical presence of others do we feel able to learn what is 'really' going on. Similarly, Jamieson (2013: 20) cautions

against believing that web-based activity will replace face-to-face relations. She argues that the internet has enabled the existing commercial sex industry - such as prostitution and pornography - to expand, noting that 'there are no signs of digitally mediated forms of engagement with sex threatening to reshape or replace "skin on skin" sexual relationships.' Urry (2003) argues that, in spite of young people today having grown up with the internet and digital technology as part of their daily lives, even this generation continues to seek out physical co-presence in global protest sites, holiday experiences, volunteer camps and large, open-air music concerts.

Yet, perhaps this conclusion is premature given the relatively recent creation of online environments or 'worlds', which are still developing. The internet has yet to reach its full potential for interaction across time and space, but one glimpse into the future is *Second Life*, a 3D virtual world which claims more than 20 million registered users. However, some estimates suggest only around 600,000 of these are active 'residents'. On *Second Life* people create their own virtual body or 'avatar' through which they then live out a 'second life' online. This ability to create an identity from scratch offers a much broader palette for the construction of online identities than the props and materials available from the fashion industry and bodily transformations in the physical world.

One aspect of this virtual world is that users can play their own music, perform their own gigs, stage concerts or attend those held by others. Some see this as a good way of 'breaking' new musical acts that may find it difficult to get noticed in conventional ways. Comparing virtual worlds and their events with those in the 'real world', it is likely that the former will always be seen as pale imitations, lacking the physical reality, smells and sounds of real-world rock concerts, for example. But it is not too fanciful to imagine that, as virtual headsets develop and virtual reality becomes ever more immersive, some of these disadvantages may be overcome. On the other hand, there are

Living a 'second life' through an online avatar offers people the opportunity to develop an alternative self to their embodied version. However, conventional social norms and rituals often transfer seamlessly into virtual worlds.

some distinct advantages to virtual environments that avoid the physicality of real-world events. Beer and Geesin (2009: 124) argue that, in future:

> The draw may not be the physicality of the experience of the gig but of attending events as the imagined avatar rocking-out with fellow avatars – moshing, pogoing or foot-tapping. It may be that rather than a compulsion to proximity these events instead reveal an opportunity to attend live musical happenings without the risks and discomforts of 'being there' at a live musical event – the crushing and pushing, the flailing hands, elbows and feet, the smell, crowd surfers, the unwelcome physical contact, the unwelcome

advances, the damp, the dirt, and, especially, the heat.

Testing whether existing microsociological concepts and theories that have proved so fruitful in analysing face-to-face interactions are capable of understanding the interactions between humans and their avatar communities in online virtual worlds is an intriguing research prospect for sociologists. And as Johnson (2010) argues, 'You might scoff at the idea of being an avatar, and strolling through virtual daisies. But, whether you participate or not, know that Second Life and other virtual communities are impacting our lives, and changing the way we understand the role of the media.'

Chapter review

1 'The study of micro-level interactions is the province of psychology, not sociology.' Explain why the micro level is important for a rounded understanding of social life.

2 With examples, explain what is meant by 'everyday sexism'.

3 Non-verbal communication (NVC) includes body language. Provide some instances of gendered NVC.

4 Provide a brief definition of ethnomethodology. Is ethnomethodology a form of micro-sociology or something else entirely?

5 To what extent does the social context of everyday conversations contribute to the meaning of speech? Provide some examples from the chapter to illustrate your answer.

6 Explain Goffman's 'dramaturgical analogy', referring to his concepts of the stage, props, front and back regions, and 'performance'.

7 'The digital revolution is antithetical to friendship and community.' How might we argue against this assertion in relation to social media use?

8 What is cyberbullying and how does it differ from traditional bullying? How could authorities tackle it more effectively?

9 List some of the rules and norms of netiquette as they apply to social media. What methods do people use when they engage in impression management online?

Research in practice

Anti-abortion activism is usually associated with religious groups in the USA, particularly organized protests outside medical centres. However, in recent years there has been anti-abortion activism outside clinics in the UK, albeit on a smaller scale than in America. The focus on violent acts and noisy demonstrations in the USA tends to mask other forms of activism, including that of simply being there. The actions of activists who attend clinics in the UK to 'bear witness' by observing, but who do not engage in shouting or overt protest, may also have a significant effect on women seeking to terminate a pregnancy.

This issue is brought into focus in the article below, which approaches the issue by drawing on the interactionist ideas of Goffman. Read the piece and answer the questions that follow.

Lowe, P., and Hayes, G. (2019) 'Anti-Abortion Clinic Activism, Civil Inattention and the Problem of Gendered Harassment', *Sociology*, 53(2): 330–46; https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0038038518762075.

1 This research adopted a mixed-methods approach. Which methods were used here?

2 What cultural and political differences do the authors identify between the USA and the UK in relation to attitudes towards abortion?

3 The article argues that UK anti-abortion activism is essentially similar to 'street accosting'. In what ways is this so?

4 What impact did the observed activism have on women who attended the clinics? In particular, how do Goffman's concepts of civil inattention and focused/unfocused interaction help us to understand the situation?

5 Do you agree with the authors that the paper provides evidence supporting the introduction of 'buffer zones' to protect women from harassment? What impact might such a policy have on the tactics of anti-abortion activists?

Thinking it through

Many interactionist accounts of social life appear particularly persuasive because they are understandable within people's own life experience. For example, Goffman's work on impression management and the presentation of self strikes a chord precisely because we are able to recognize these in our own behaviour. Yet a large amount of sociological research has focused on examining *macrosocial* structures, such as class, ethnicity and gender, socio-historical change and the impact of 'social forces', on the individual.

Work through this chapter from the start up to the heading 'Interaction norms for the digital age' (p. 495), noting wherever macrosocial phenomena and social structures are implied, assumed or referred to in the discussion. Do interactionist sociologies fail satisfactorily to explain the emergence and persistence of structured social divisions? How have other sociological perspectives accounted for social class, ethnic and gender divisions? How fair is the criticism that interactionism is good at *describing* aspects of social life but is not capable of properly *explaining* it?

Society in the arts

Are our online 'friendships' really the same as those we forge through face-to-face interactions? In the digital age, with the ubiquity of social media contacts and communication, what does friendship look like anyway? One interesting experiment is that of the American visual artist Tanja Hollander, who set out in 2011 to meet with and photograph all of her 626 social media 'friends'. The project took around five years to complete.

Hollander exhibited some of the work in 2017 in a multimedia exhibition, 'Are You Really My Friend?'. Her website displays some of the photographs from this project: http://areyoureallymyfriend.com/portraits.html, together with other materials collected during her travels: http://areyoureallymyfriend.com/. A secondary account of the project can be found at www.pressherald.com/2017/01/29/tanja-hollander-finds-answers-to-are-you-really-my-friend/. Add your own research about Hollander's ideas and artwork.

1 Early in the project, Hollander suggested that 'Facebook isn't a substitute for real relationships but it's a way to start connections' (cited in O'Neill 2012). Is this really the case? Construct an argument that social media friendships are every bit as 'real' as those in face-to-face relationships.

2 Why might it be argued that the interaction between the artist and her 'friends' may have militated against any objective findings? As this is an artistic work and not social science, does that matter? Should we expect to learn something different about friendship from works of art?

Further reading

For an introductory text covering all of the theories and issues in this chapter, Susie Scott's (2009) *Making Sense of Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Polity) is excellent, as is Brian Roberts's (2006) *Micro Social Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan). Both are well written and reliable introductions. Particular perspectives can be pursued further in *Encountering the Everyday: An Introduction to the Sociologies of the Unnoticed* (2008), edited by Michael Hviid Jacobsen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

For the work of Garfinkel and others, you might try David Francis and Stephen Hester's (2004) *An Invitation to Ethnomethodology: Language, Society and Interaction* (London: Sage). Martyn Hammersley's (2018) *The Radicalism of Ethnomethodology: An Assessment of Sources and Principles* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) is commendably well written and very clear, comparing Garfinkel's ideas to those of Simmel and Goffman. Goffman's approach is best read in his own book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1990 [1959]), which is a brilliant example of interactionist sociology. Among many secondary accounts of Goffman's work are Greg Smith's (2006) *Erving Goffman* (London: Routledge) and Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Søren Kristiansen's (2014) *The Social Thought of Erving Goffman* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage). Both are lively discussions.

For a comprehensive introduction to online communication and interaction, see Nancy K. Baym's (2015) *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (2nd edn, Cambridge: Polity) or Crispin Thurlow, Laura Lengel and Alice Tomic's (2004) *Computer Mediated Communication: An Introduction to Social Interaction Online* (London: Sage), which is a hands-on guide to CMC.

For a collection of original readings on interaction and communication, see the accompanying *Sociology: Introductory Readings* (4th edn, Cambridge: Polity, 2021).

Internet links

Additional information and support for this book at Polity:
www.politybooks.com/giddens9

Exploring Nonverbal Communication – an introduction to NVC with a self-test of reading examples:
https://nonverbal.ucsc.edu/

The Everyday Sexism Project – a site dedicated to cataloguing real-world experiences of sexism:
https://everydaysexism.com/

Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction – exactly what it says, with a journal and many resources:
https://symbolicinteraction.org/