

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

THOMAS J. SCHEFF, *Goffman Unbound!: A New Paradigm for Social Science*. London: Paradigm Publishers, 2006, 206 p. , index.

As suggested by the title, Thomas Scheff's primary task in *Goffman Unbound!* is to highlight a range of underdeveloped possibilities initiated by Erving Goffman's sociology. These possibilities are not restricted to academic analysis, however. Scheff seeks to inspire sociological insight that transcends cognitive understanding and takes the form of emotional "realization" and personal sociological awareness. His approach is reflexive and wide-ranging. *Goffman Unbound!* would be of interest to anyone concerned with the history of sociology; the sociology of emotions; the integration of theoretical and empirical work; and of course, Erving Goffman. It is accessible, and may be of interest to students of sociology at any stage of their training. *Goffman Unbound!* consists of three interrelated parts, each of which is topically reviewed below. Scheff revisits his basic theses often enough that each chapter can be read on its own according to the interests of the reader.

For Scheff, the absence of authorial reflexivity is a critical limitation of Goffman's sociology. In Part I, he attempts to link Goffman's personal life and sociology through personal recollection partnered with biographical notes. This is followed by a "clarification" of Goffman's sociological contributions (indeed a contested task). Scheff, like many others, suggests that one of Goffman's most valuable contributions to contemporary social science is conceptual. Goffman was dedicated to "deconstructing" the "assumptive" social world through compiling extensive taxonomies of social interaction. He then moves into an analysis of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, highlighting tension between Goffman's structuralist and interactionist influences (particularly Cooley's "looking glass self"), emphasizing Goffman's analysis of embarrassment, and linking it to shame.

This concentration on emotion adds another dimension to the secondary literature on Goffman's sociology, which has thus far focused primarily on the theoretical orientation of his sociology (structuralist or interactionist), its political quality (conservative, liberal, or radical), its intellectual roots (Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown, Simmel, Everett Hughes, existentialism, etc.), its compatibility with other sociological programs (ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, feminism, poststructuralism) and its future (the interaction order, anti-psychiatry). *Goffman Unbound!* engages these debates critically, focusing on Goffman's ability to work

outside of mainstream sociological practice and systematically identify new subjects for sociological analysis. Like Stephen Harold Riggins' edited volume *Beyond Goffman: Studies on Communication, Institution and Social Interaction* (1990), Scheff applies key Goffmanian concepts to diverse sociological problems, illustrating the versatility of Goffmanian sociology.

In Part II, Scheff credits Goffman with being “the poet and the prophet” of the “emotional/relational” world (97). He examines Goffman's work on emotions, comparing it with that of Elias, Freud, and Helen Block Lewis, who also wrote extensively on shame and embarrassment. The emotional discourses they employed, however, were sometimes a condemning factor. For example, Scheff proposes that Elias' work was (initially) ill received in the United States because of a taboo on the notion of shame. Goffman, however, addressed shame through embarrassment, which Scheff suggests was a more palatable notion for American readers.

Scheff then examines Frame Analysis, demonstrating how Goffman's most complex work advanced a theory of the structure of “context” and intersubjectivity, the ultimate potential of which is a coherent model of social facts. This model emerges when Frame Analysis is partnered with some of Goffman's earlier work, which Scheff reads as an exploration of “the intersubjective structure of consensus.” As with his commentary on *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Scheff departs considerably from other secondary literature.

Scheff extends some basic Goffmanian concepts into a sociology of the emotional/relational world in Part III. He begins by defining the structural aspects of love and hate, breaking them down to the interplay of certain variables and connecting them to pride, shame, and embarrassment. He illustrates the theory through a series of conversation analyses of domestic conflicts – his students reenact familial disputes in his advanced undergraduate seminars and together they “deconstruct” the scenes – emphasizing shame and pride.

One central weakness of Goffman's sociology, according to Scheff, was his failure to relate micro analysis to collective cooperation and conflict (a criticism that others, for example, Anne Rawls, have dismissed as misguided). For instance, how does one explain why people act against their own political and economic interests? This leads Scheff to develop an original theory of hypermasulinity, which he relates to individual personalities – such as Goffman himself – and to macro problems, such as nationalism. Peace and war, Scheff reflects, are intimately connected to nationalism, which is in turn related to emotional alienation.

Scheff proposes that social science must adopt a part/whole approach to theory and research, his own model of which was developed through readings of Spinoza and Bernard Phillips. Such an approach demands reflexivity and authorial self-consciousness, a dedication to the development of new concepts, and a commitment to relating concrete

empirical work with abstract theoretical work. For Scheff, a Goffmanian social science embraces these three elements.

Scheff's reflexivity is at times unusual and quirky. He writes, for instance, that when he initially became aware of the political nature of the "emotional world" surrounding him, he cried once every day for an entire year (168). The experiences of his students – which are admittedly a little annoying at times – seem to parallel his own. Although the self-consciousness is a little exaggerated at times, this quirkiness makes *Goffman Unbound!* a more personable read.

"This book," Scheff writes, "represents recent thinking on the micro-world of emotions and relationships. It is a world we all live in everyday, but have been trained not to notice" (143). Indeed, one of Scheff's central tasks is to ease readers into a personal sociological realization of this emotional world. In Goffmanesque fashion, this involves moving past the vernacular limitations of notions like embarrassment, love, and hate into more sociologically informed concepts. Vernacular language obscures the emotional/relational world and emphasizes cognition and behavior.

The range of the book is admirable. Scheff discusses alternatives to biopsychiatry, develops a complex taxonomy of love, considers how unacknowledged shame and emotional alienation can cultivate hatred, delineates the sociality of emotions – which he claims are portrayed individualistically by vernacular description – develops a theory of hyper-masculinity, violence, and nationalism. Reflecting his commitment to a "part/whole" analysis, Scheff partners abstract theory with micro and macro problems, relating concrete particulars through multiple levels of abstraction.

*Goffman Unbound!* is an interesting and unusual read. Those who are familiar with the extensive literature on Goffman's sociological legacy will find compelling arguments about his contributions to the sociology of emotions and emotional politics. Scheff's commitment to authorial self-consciousness is admirable as is his task of inspiring a personal sociological awareness that transcends a cognitive understanding of logical structures of thought. Scheff is not just dedicated to delineating academic possibilities in the wake of one of sociology's most famous figures, but to demonstrating some possibilities of living sociologically. In addition to those interested in the sociological career of Erving Goffman or the sociology of emotions, Scheff's latest book would be ideal for undergraduate and graduate courses. It is lucidly written, reflexive, and encourages students to think sociologically about everyday life.

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