

Goffman's Face Theory

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“Fake Smile. Everything Is Under Control: The Flawless Performance of Motherhood”

By Jocelyn M. Degroot & Tennley A. Vik



Purpose of Study

- How do women describe self-presentations of motherhood?
- How do others' disclosures about and performance of motherhood impact moms' own experiences of others?
- Analyze mothers as actors - comparing their front stage to backstage
- Understand why mothers put on a positive face

Participants

- 136 mothers
 - Between the ages of 22 to 52
 - Had anywhere from 1 to 5 children
- Work Status
 - 24 stay at home mothers
 - 9 worked part time from home
 - 8 worked full time from home
 - 12 worked part time out of the house
 - 83 worked full time out of the house
- Marital Status
 - 120 married
 - 7 divorced
 - 9 living together, engaged, single, or separated



Data Analysis and Results

- Utilized inductive thematic analysis and NVivo qualitative coding software to organize categories and create themes within the data
- Three categories:
 - Performances of motherhood
 - Invisible labor of motherhood
 - Communication privacy management in parenthood
- Two main themes:
 - Participants' own positive self presentation of motherhood
 - Others' descriptions of their motherhood challenges

Result Analysis

- Mothers tend to present their lives as simpler and more positive
- Want to be seen as “put together” and not a hot mess
- Repeated lines
 - “I want to be seen as a good mom”
 - “I don’t want the judgement”
 - “I only post positive things about my family”
 - “It is like living two lives”
- Mothers were told mostly positive stories from other mothers/families
- People avoid talking about the challenges of motherhood



Motherhood & Face Theory

- Impression management
- Mothers maintain a positive face and use preventative facework
- Front stage and backstage
 - How mothers present themselves to others
 - True emotions and challenges that come from motherhood



Limitations & Evaluation

- Having fewer participants could have allowed for more in-depth interviews since this is a qualitative study
 - Limited by lack of generalizability
 - Relies on subjective interpretation
 - Findings cannot be applied to all mothers - context specific analysis
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- Provides in-depth understanding of face theory
 - Qualitative study allows for more specific findings
 - Strong example of critical communication research

Discussion

- Is maintaining this flawless image helpful or harmful for mothers? Why?
- Why do you think mothers feel the need to always maintain a positive face?
- How might reducing the need for constant face work improve people's well being?
- Which do you think is easier- preventative facework or corrective facework?

Connection to Media - Mulan

- Front stage performance
 - a submissive bride
- Backstage performance
 - showing her true feelings and wanting to be herself, not who her family wants her to be

https://youtu.be/1_BtIAw4trq

