

## Book Report

### **STIGMA – Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity**

by Erving Goffman  
Simon and Schuster/Touchstone Books, New York

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#### Notes on the structure of this Book Report

Three Levels of summary can be accessed quickly and efficiently depending on the time and interest in this subject matter.

1. *A two-page “executive summary” can be efficiently gleaned by reading only the italicized book overview in green italics on p.2 and 3 of this report.*
2. *A quick read summary can be obtained by reading the green italicized two-page “executive summary” and the **Chapter Overviews in blue italics** for each chapter.*
3. A third level of detail is the full book report that follows each Chapter Overview and is a detailed distillation of key points within each Chapter. Every attempt has been made to keep the reviewer’s perspective out of the picture and to keep the ideas true to Goffman’s text. Of course, the mere selection and distillation or emphasis process biases the objectivity and reflects subjective aspects of the reviewer. The reviewer apologizes for this and also for inadvertent misunderstandings of Goffman’s original text.

## ***Two-Page Executive Summary***

### ***Overview of STIGMA – Notes on the management of spoiled identity***

#### ***Structure of the Book***

*Goffman has structured his book STIGMA around five concept clusters with a chapter for each:*

- 1. Conceptual constructs for the phenomena of Identity, Spoiled Identity, Stigmatization and its causes – in other words – what is Stigma; what is its relation to Identity and Social Identity in particular; and how does Stigmatization arise?*
- 2. The impact of Social and Personal Information on our “Identity” and the possibility of the Management of a Spoiled Identity.*
- 3. The search for a doctrine or philosophy of life to deal with the ambivalent sense of “self,” the influences on the stigmatized of “their own” versus normals’ expectations and demands, and the resultant “identity crisis” resulting from the stigmatized individual’s choice of orientation or alignment to these two Groups’ “external imputations” of what a “self” should be.*
- 4. Considerations that the concept of Stigma is a result of societal norms, gaps between virtual and actual compliance and conformity to those norms, and the extension that the “stigmatized” and “normal” are not, in the ultimate analysis, fixed persons or instances, but points of view that all participants in society must learn to be aware of and adopt as an adaptation skill. The concept of Deviation is explored to link the study of Stigma to the study of the rest of the social world.*
- 5. Contemplations about the relationship between the specific study of Stigma versus general social studies on sociological issues whose core dynamic relates to deviations and deviance. The point is made that the lessons from the specific study of Stigma can be applied to the understanding of other social issues related to deviations and deviance in a context of addressing normative dilemmas. In so doing, students can focus on what distinguishes these other social challenges while seeing that one of the aspects they have in common is addressed by considerations of Stigma and its management.*

#### ***Content of the Book***

*Goffman’s book STIGMA – Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity deals with the effects of varying degrees of social and self-identity awareness on the possible adaptive patterns of behavior and accommodation that may arise when stigmatized individuals interact with “normals” in immediate physical proximity of each other in various social settings.*

*Goffman deals with various definitional aspects of Stigma and contrasts ego identity (what an individual feels about stigma and its management) versus the more external pragmatic challenges of social identity management (its effect on stigmatization) and*

*personal identity (and its related information management challenges). He also highlights various subtleties about whether the stigma is known before the encounter and the degree to which it is perceptible or not to those involved. He also considers the time dimension and the resultant “identity management” considerations before and after the encounter for both normals and the stigmatized. This multidimensional analysis leads to various specific strategies for dealing with the situations that arise. These strategies include tension management and information management.*

*Goffman goes on to examine the specific phases in the socialization of stigmatized persons as they struggle to reconcile experienced gaps between their own perceived reality and the identity standards they choose to apply to themselves. He is careful to point out the social group influences on such individuals and the effects of these groups on the individual’s attempts to “find a self.”*

*Goffman makes an effort to extend the specific issues at the root of stigmatization and the management of identity to society at large. He observes that “general identity values of a society may be fully entrenched nowhere, and yet they can cast a shadow on encounters everywhere.” He stresses that identity norms breed deviations as well as conformance, and that, therefore, “stigma management is a general feature of society, a process occurring wherever there are identity norms.” He encourages people to raise their awareness of these issues so that they are able to play “both parts in the normal – deviant drama.” He goes further to say that “normal” and “stigmatized” are not persons but rather perspectives.*

*Goffman describes a win/win adaptation involving “a form of tacit cooperation between normals and the stigmatized: the deviator can afford to remain attached to the norm because others are careful to respect his secret, pass lightly over its disclosure, or disattend evidence which prevents a secret from being made of it; these others, in turn, can afford to extend this tactfulness because the stigmatized will voluntarily refrain from pushing claims for acceptance much past the point normals find comfortable.”*

*Goffman concludes the book with a suggestion that the studies of deviations and deviance on various social scales – from small, family-like groups to face-to-face encounters with morality deviations at the local level, to metropolitan-scale social deviants expressing a collective denial of the social order – are all sociological areas of concern that may benefit from the specific study of Stigma and that the awareness gained and lessons learned may be useful to all such studies of deviation. Goffman feels that these root concerns are a common issue shared by many traditional fields of social problem study and management.*

[For the sake of readability, quotations will not be used in the remainder of this report around the word “normal,” while recognizing the subtleties involved in identifying anything as normal.]

## Chapter One – Stigma and Social Identity

### *Overview of Chapter 1*

*In the first chapter Goffman focuses on useful definitions of Stigma and the role of Social Identity on the stigmatization of individuals.*

*Interaction between normals and the stigmatized can include a huge range of “contact” situations, so Goffman narrows the field of study to the issues surrounding identity management in mixed contact social situations involving immediate physical presence of both stigmatized and “normals.” In these situations, the causes and effects of stigma must be directly confronted by both sides and are considered to be more revealing of the dynamics at work. It is these patterns of response and adaptation both on the part of “normals” and stigmatized individuals that Goffman explores in later chapters.*

### **Conceptual Definitions**

#### Concepts/descriptions/definitions around **Stigma**

Early Greek usage of the term *Stigma* referred to markings of the body intentionally applied to an individual to indicate unacceptable behavioral or moral traits as compared to prevailing standards.

Later, Christian usage imputed two other meanings to the word and interpretations of bodily physical features as: indicators of holy grace and/or physical disorder.

These approaches involve concepts of “imputing meaning onto something” which on its own may not at all possess this meaning and secondly, “dealing with variations to a norm.”

#### **Goffman identifies three types of Stigma:**

1. Body (physical)
2. Character (personal)
3. Tribal (social)

#### Concepts/descriptions/definitions around **Stigmatization**

Goffman envisions the trigger condition to stigmatization as being a “gap” or “disappointment” between perceived attributes and stereotypes. According to Goffman, Stigma is a relation between attribute and stereotype. But he introduces a wake-up call:

we are not fully aware that we have, project, and use stereotypes, and we are not fully aware we anticipate conformity to this stereotype, and we are not fully aware that the anticipation of things “fitting” to this stereotype turns into an expectation of “fit.” When this “fit” is disappointed, there is a stigmatization that we must deal with.

Social Identity and Personal Identity attributes are contrasted to Ego identity issues that concern an individual’s subjective feelings about his own situation, continuity, and character. At this stage in the book, Goffman focuses on structural and other aspects of social identity. These aspects are examined from both a virtual and actual point of view. Discrepancies between the virtual and actual dimensions of social identity are at the root of the dynamic that needs to be managed by both normals and stigmatized.

### Concepts/descriptions/definitions around **Stereotypes**

Goffman asserts that stereotypes are composites of social categories available for classification (be they socio-structural, e.g. occupation, or personal, e.g. honesty) and their linked attributes. Members of a social category may be imputed attributes. Members of other social categories sit in judgment of the degree of conformity of evidence of attributes versus expected ones. We tend to hold others to this conformity for being part of that group. We do not always consider the standards or expected attributes to be universal or objective or as necessarily applying to ourselves. We often hold these standards to others because of their social categories, but feel no “gap” and no stigma for not demonstrating those standards ourselves if we see ourselves as lying outside the social category in question. So it is not a question of objective standards and attributes but only of those expected of a given social category. Then that particular link of category and attribute set becomes a stereotype. The stereotype becomes a type of shorthand for the anticipations and expectations about that group and its members.

### Concepts/descriptions/definitions around **Attributes**

An attribute is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself but only relative to our stereotypes. In the dynamics of being in the presence of someone, Goffman points out that there is an emerging awareness of an attribute(s) perceived as being outside those attributes stereotypically expected for a person in the socially anticipated category.

### Dealing with the “gap” or **Stigma**

Identity beliefs have an effect on how one deals with Stigma. One can bear a stigma and be relatively untouched, insulated and protected by identity beliefs of his own. Some people may have a construct that acts as a frame of reference and expectations for themselves and lies apart from other possible identity frameworks including social identity.

Other people may only have a sense of social identity and define themselves primarily by that construct. Such people see themselves as unquestionably fitting into a selected social category. They understand all too well the generally accepted social expectations/standards for that category to which they belong. If there is an attribute “gap,” an individual agrees that he falls short of what he really ought to be and he experiences shame. So shame in this usage is the individual’s perception of one of his own attributes being a defiling thing to possess. Such an individual virtually expects others to hold him accountable to this “gap.” Stigmatized persons may try to avoid direct confrontations with normals, given the uncertainty of status in the mind of normals. Such a direct confrontation requires conscious calculation of impressions made, leading to a state of anxious self-consciousness. The central feature of a stigmatized individual’s situation in life is acceptance and the lack of it. It is often put into words as the “failure to accord him respect.” Here we can see the clash between a virtual identity based on stereotypes and imputed attributes and the actual identity. Where there is a negative “gap” Stigma exists.

Where a person has his own constructs to insulate himself from these dynamics the issue of Stigma is not a concern. However, when the stigmatized individual defines himself as no different from any other human being, while at the same time he and those around him define him as someone set apart, then “given this basic self-contradiction of the stigmatized individual it is understandable that he will make some effort to find a way out of his dilemma, if only to find a doctrine which makes consistent sense out of his situation.” The person will attempt to hammer out his own code and also seek out professionals to help.

The issue is one of stigmatized individuals projecting information about themselves and the possible reactions of normals. The strategy in managing this projection, and expectations, and dealing with the dynamics is in the scope of Goffman’s term “Management of Spoiled Identity.” The “gap” between virtual and actual identity leaves a “disappointment” of expectations between the perceived attributes and those anticipated for the social category the person was assumed to belong to, and in the negative sense this dynamic “spoils the identity.”

## **Chapter Two – Information Control and Personal Identity**

### *Overview of Chapter 2*

*Goffman distinguishes Personal Identity from Social Identity and Ego Identity. The focus of this chapter is Personal Identity and information control as part of stigma management. Goffman elucidates information control through his considerations of social information (signs and symbols) and personal information (Personal Identity and Biography). Goffman deals with the concepts of The Discredited, The Discreditable, Social Information and Strategies & Techniques (including “Covering”) available for the Management of a Spoiled Identity where gaps exist between social aspects of identity and personal identity, and also between virtual and actual identity constructs.*

### **The Discredited – A focus on the Management of Tension**

Where a stigma is visible – that is, plainly known and seen – the person may be considered Discredited. Here the issue is one of managing the resultant tensions that may arise in the interaction between normals and the stigmatized. Tension management strategies depend on the nature of the perception of the stigma. This goes beyond the mere physical perception of the stigma as a thing on its own.

Goffman provides further subtlety about “visibility.” He asks us to consider that the “decoding capacity of the audience must be specified before one can speak of degree of visibility.”

Therefore, he distinguishes between

1. “Known-about-ness” (the degree of previous knowledge about a person’s stigma),
2. “Obtrusiveness” (the degree to which the nature of the stigma causes it to interfere with the normal flow of interaction)
3. “Perceived focus” (the degree of consideration given to a stigma’s impact on the focus area of the interaction)

Therefore, these aspects of “visibility” impact the choice of tension management strategies for the discredited.

### **The Discreditable – A Focus on the Management of Information**

Where the stigma is hidden and unseen, the danger and anxiousness relate to the stigma being discovered or revealed and the individual is termed Discreditable. This latter state of being discreditable is far more sinister and complex. As Goffman points out, “it is not

that he (the discreditable person) must face prejudice against himself, but rather that he must face unwitting acceptance of himself by individuals who are prejudiced against persons of the kind he can be revealed to be.” Of concern here is the management of undisclosed discrediting information.

Both discredited and discreditable individuals may experience discrimination, and the attitudes and behavioral reactions may vary in each case.

### **The Management of Spoiled Identity**

This “management of spoiled identity” is presented as “management of tension” for those cases of discredited individuals whose stigma is known to normals before the interaction, whereas for discreditable individuals – where uncertainty exists as to whether the stigma is believed to be known by normals – it is reduced to “management of information and impressions.” The information that is being managed is considered in two areas ... that of Social Information and that of Personal Identity Information. Goffman holds that Stigma management is a general feature of society, a process occurring wherever there are identity norms. Goffman suggests that both normals and the stigmatized need to raise their awareness of such situations where the choice of both tension and information management strategies are useful.

### **Social Information – and Its Management**

The author creates a useful definition of social information as having the following properties:

Social Information is information:

1. About an individual
2. About abiding characteristics
3. Conveyed by the very person it is about through bodily expression in the immediate presence of those who receive the expression

Goffman asserts that “signs” carry and convey social information. He distinguishes between

1. Signs that are **frequently and steadily available** and are also **routinely sought and received**. To this subset of signs Goffman ascribes the label “symbols.”
  - a. Status symbols or prestige symbols
  - b. Stigma symbols – draw attention to a debasing identity discrepancy
2. Signs that are **intentionally** used by the “actor” in a **positive** direction to throw severe doubt on the validity of virtual identity
  - a. Dis-identifiers

3. Signs that are **fugitive** in nature and have not been institutionalized as information carriers
  - a. Points: signs that make claims to prestige (e.g., clear diction)
  - b. Slips: signs that discredit tacit claims to prestige (e.g., faux pas behavior)
4. Signs designed **by man** solely for the purpose of conveying social information
  - a. Insignia (e.g., ex-military rank)
5. Signs that are **permanent**
  - a. Permanent Congenital signs (e.g., skin color)
  - b. Permanent Non-congenital signs (e.g., maiming)
6. Signs that are **impermanent**
  - a. Impermanent Signs implemented against the will (related to stigma symbols)
  - b. Impermanent Signs willingly and voluntarily implemented (e.g., a convict's shaved head)

Goffman points out that signs are subjectively utilized and their use and interpretation changes over time.

The author also includes observations that “who you are with” speaks volumes about who you are, justly or not. Therefore, “who you are with” carries and conveys social information.

The point of Goffman’s examination of signs, symbols and “the company you keep” relates to areas of social information that people must be aware of if they are to succeed in managing the totality of information they wish to convey about themselves. It also raises awareness of how we interpret the signs and symbols we subjectively decode about others.

### **Personal Identity – and Its Management**

Goffman makes a point of distinguishing between identification in two areas:

1. Psychological identification
2. Criminological identification

He sees a continuum of relationships with public life at one end and intimacy at the other. He asserts that familiarity and frequency of contact cannot automatically be correlated to a simpler identity management task. He believes that stigma management is needed throughout the spectrum.

Goffman maintains that we see people as “an instance of the category” to which we perceive they belong with all the socially standardized anticipations regarding their expected conduct and nature.

“Identity” in Goffman’s constructs depends on the concept of uniqueness. He breaks **Uniqueness** down as being composed of the following:

1. Identity pegs/marks
2. Collective combination of life history items as a whole
  - a. Social facts
  - b. Biographical facts
3. The core of a person’s being

With this in mind, we can view Personal Identity as defined by Goffman as including points 1 and 2 but excluding point 3.

Goffman consider a person’s **Biography** as having two aspects that need consideration:

1. Management of role and audience segregation
2. Informational connectedness

He also introduces the conceptual differences between

- Social misrepresentation
- Personal misrepresentation

Goffman then explores the norms regarding social identity, which he takes as the roles, repertoires, or profiles permissible for a given individual to sustain social personality.

The author draws our attention to the bearing of personal and social identification on each other.

In examining the “World of Others” Goffman sees a continuum with those who know us on one end and those who do not have personal identification facts or biographical facts about us on the other end. He goes on to describe recognition along this continuum, from cognitive recognition as an act of perception by those who know us, to social recognition based on social identifiers and, finally, the public image of a person available to complete strangers.

In consideration of the dynamics of personal information and social information being known or not known to those around us, the question arises about making attempts to disguise or hide the stigma from a class of people who might not know about it or from whom you wish to conceal it. This attempt to “get away with” not revealing the stigma is termed “passing.”

The author describes a **natural cycle in “Passing”**:

1. Unwitting
2. Unintentional

3. For fun
4. Non-routine
5. Routine
6. Disappearance

**Problems and Consequences of “Passing” include:**

1. Unanticipated need to disclose discrediting information
2. “In deeper-ism”
3. Making efforts to conceal certain incapacities with the consequence that observers impute the existence of other incapacities in their place
4. Learning what they “really think”
5. Not knowing “who knows what”
6. Exposure during face-to-face interaction
7. Being called to a showdown
8. Presence of fellow sufferers or “the Wise”

**Control of Identity information varies in three types of Relationships:**

1. Pre-stigma relationships
2. Post-stigma relationships
3. Fleeting relationships

Goffman distinguishes between voluntarily hiding from one class of people and being forced by circumstances beyond the scope of the current dynamic interaction to present a false image of yourself by default. In both cases there is a chance of being “found out.” There is a threat of discreditation, which may lead to exposure to blackmail.

**Goffman identifies three types of blackmail:**

1. Pre-blackmail
2. Self-saving blackmail
3. Full or classic blackmail

He also goes on to distinguish between a simple double life and a double double life and the increasing complexity of keeping the information story straight.

Goffman outlines the evolving learning process of a stigmatized individual. This learning breaks down into phases in the socialization of stigmatized persons. The five phases in the socialization of stigmatized persons are:

1. Learning the normal point of view
2. Learning he is disqualified as a normal

3. Learning to cope with the way others treat the kind of person he can be shown to be
4. Learning to Pass (turning point in moral career)
5. Learning that he can come to feel above passing, unlearn concealment, and adopt voluntary disclosure. This is the final mature phase of socialization.

An individual with a secret differentness can find himself in three kinds of places:

1. Out of bounds
2. Civil places
3. Back places (both voluntary and involuntary)

In this manner the individual's world is divided up spatially by social identity and personal identity considerations.

This kind of spatial partitioning of an individual's world establishes the going price for

- Revealing or concealing
- Significance of being known about or not

Considerations of the above impact an individual's choice of information strategies to manage his social and personal identity.

**The key Identity Management issue:** that what are unthinking routines for normals can become management problems for the discreditable. As Goffman puts it, "The person with a secret failing, then, must be alive to the social situation as a scanner of possibilities, and is therefore likely to be alienated from the simpler world in which those around him apparently dwell."

### **Techniques of Information Control**

Goffman uses a concept of "the daily round." He distinguishes between the daily round of the discreditable, which revolves around contingencies in managing information about themselves, and the daily round of the discredited, which involves tension management around the cycle of restriction to social acceptance.

**The following Strategies and Techniques of information control are outlined:**

**Strategy 1 – Conceal or obliterate signs that have become stigma symbols**  
**Techniques for Strategy 1:**

- Name changing
- Reject equipment revealing failure
- Use of disidentifiers

- Use of a cover
- Use of a special established routine for passing

**Strategy 2 – Present stigma signs as merely those of another less stigmatic issue (lesser of two evils approach)**

**Techniques for Strategy 2:**

- Absentminded versus posing as “easily bored”
- Hard of hearing versus posing as “being a daydreamer”

**Strategy 3 – Reveal nothing to a large group and selectively choose what to reveal to a small group of confidants**

**Techniques for Strategy 3:**

- Relationship distance management
- Disconnectedness
- Brief time exposures
- Isolation

**Strategy 4 – Voluntarily disclose stigma, thus transforming the approach from an information management challenge to a tension management challenge.**

**Techniques for Strategy 4:**

- Voluntarily wear a stigma symbol
- Purposeful slips giving fleeting evidence
- Disclosure etiquette

**Covering** is described by Goffman as a technique with the following objectives:

1. To reduce tension
  - a. It is easier for himself and others to withdraw covert attention from the stigma to help focus on the official content of the interaction.
2. To restrict the way in which a known attribute obtrudes itself into the center of attention.

**Covering – Techniques**

- Management of standards associated with stigma bracket
- Restricted display of failings most centrally identified with the stigma
- Organization of social situations to minimize stigmatization

## Chapter 3 – Group Alignment and Ego Identity

### *Overview of Chapter 3*

*In Chapter 3 Goffman comments on an individual's sense of self, two contexts which impact the sense of self, and the nature of those two contexts. Goffman divides an individual's world of affiliations and sources of influence into an "us" and "them" binary world with the stigmatized individual caught striving to find a place in both and sometimes belonging to neither. He labels these two contexts "In-Group" and "Out-Group." He labels the like-stigmatized persons as "The Own" and acknowledges a gray zone of "The Wise" who are from the "Them/Out-Group" side but have gained some comfort with and acceptance into the "Own/In-Group" side.*

*In this chapter Goffman also provides insights into the professional spokespersons for the "In-Group" and the political overtones that we need to be aware of.*

*The key point in this chapter is the ambivalence of self, the stigmatized feel. The stigmatized may be searching for a "self" and often it feels as if that "self" were merely a construct of "the alien voice of the group speaking for and through" the stigmatized person. At the very same time, the individual is told he is "a human being like everyone else" and also that he isn't, by both the "In-Group" and "Out-Group," but from different perspectives. The stigmatized feel "people do not only expect you to play your part; they also expect you to know your place." Another poignant view is "that the stigmatized individual can be caught taking the tactful acceptance of himself [by the "Out-Group" of normals] too seriously"; in other words, actually believing it to be genuine and unconditional when in reality the acceptance of himself by the normals is conditional. Furthermore, this conditional acceptance "depends upon normals not being pressed past the point at which they can easily extend acceptance – or, at worst, uneasily extend it." As Goffman points out, "This contradiction and joke is his fate and his destiny. The stigmatized individual thus finds himself in an arena of detailed argument and discussion concerning what he ought to think of himself." This ambivalence of self is an acute reality for the stigmatized.*

### **Ambivalence**

Before we can understand what Goffman says about ambivalence we need to review his breakdown of Identity.

Goffman makes the following distinctions, which he details in Chapter 1 and 2:

- **Social Identity:** this construct of stereotypes, assumptions, and the relationships of what a person is to society's expectations for a given instance of a social category stereotype leads to "unfulfilled gaps," which lead to stigmatization.

- **Personal Identity:** this construct of biographical and other personal data, the relationships of what is known about this data and by whom, leads to the “tension and information” control aspects of stigma management for the discredited and discreditable respectively.

Now in Chapter 3 he introduces Ego Identity, the third aspect of Identity in his scheme.

- **Ego Identity:** “the subjective sense of his own situation, continuity, character as it is felt by the individual.” This aspect of identity (and chapter 3) is all about what an individual feels about stigma and its management (covered in chapters 1 and 2) and examines the sources and nature of the advice he is given from “In-Group” and “Out-Group” sources.

### **Identity Ambivalence**

Why Ambivalence?

- An individual feels identity ambivalence because of the gap between his reality and the identity standards he applies to himself.

Expressions of Ambivalence:

- Oscillations of Identity and associations with fellow stigmatized
- Tendency to stratify his “Own” according to the degree to which their stigma is apparent and obtrusive and further to react from a “stigmatized” perspective to those with lesser degrees of stigma and from the perspective of a “normal” to those with greater degrees of appearance and obtrusiveness of their stigma.
- Social alliances –e.g., choice of friends, dates

Causes of acute feelings of Ambivalence occur when

- Physically close to his own behaving in stereotyped ways
- “Nearing,” which is a term Goffman uses to indicate a situation wherein the stigmatized individual comes close to an undesirable instance of his own kind while “with” a normal. That is, the presence of a normal while such an instance is happening alters the situation and causes acute stress about his identity.

Given this ambivalence, the individual searches for a doctrine or life philosophy to make sense out of his situation and two sources of doctrines, platforms, politics, instructions, suggested attitudes to self arise from

- In-Groups – in political terminology
- Out-Groups – in psychiatric terminology

## **In-Group Alignments**

The following are In-Group **codes of advocacy** to make sense out of the situation and cope:

1. Patterns of revealing & concealing
2. Formulae for dealing with ticklish situations
3. Support to be given to his own
4. Type of fraternization with normals
5. Suggested reactions (ignore or react) to prejudice shown to his own
6. Balance between being normal and different
7. Facts about his own to generate pride
8. Facing up to his own differentness
9. Warnings against:
  - a. “Passing” completely
  - b. Fully accepting as his own the negative attitude of others toward him
  - c. Minstrelization and adopting a clownish role
  - d. Normalization

The **consequences** of In-Group Advocacy are highlighted as:

- Becoming a critic of the social scene
- Becoming too situation-conscious
- Dealing with the fact that these In-Group advocates have made what is most private and embarrassing to the stigmatized individual public and collective and, therefore, the individual must also deal with that unsolicited exposure and betrayal by his own.

The **point of view** of the In-Group is that

- They are the stigmatized individual’s “real” family and “natural” group.

**The individual can then**

- Turn to his group and therefore they label him as “loyal and authentic”
- Turn away from his group and therefore they label him as “craven and foolish”

So in part, his “nature” is generated by the nature of his group affiliations, which can for some In-Groups become political, militant and chauvinistic.

## **Out-Group Alignments**

The **point of view** of the Out-Group advocacy is that

1. The stigmatized individual should see himself as fully human and as someone who, at worst, is only excluded from merely one area of social life.
2. The stigmatized individual should not be ashamed or try to conceal his condition.
3. Hard work, self-training, and a cheerful outgoing manner are best.
4. Normals mean no harm or, at worst, they don't know any better.
5. Normals should be tactfully helped to act nicely toward the stigmatized.
6. The stigmatized bears the ownership for:
  - a. the sympathetic re-education of normals
  - b. conscious efforts to reduce tension in tricky situations with normals
  - c. proffering normals' temporary status as "The Wise"
  - d. tactfully accepting encroachments on privacy

The **consequences** of Out-Group Advocacy are highlighted as:

- Obliging the stigmatized to protect normals in a variety of ways
- Danger when the stigmatized allow themselves to be taken in and to believe that they are more accepted than they really are. They will then attempt to participate socially in areas of contact that normals feel are not their proper place.
- Expecting the stigmatized to know their "real" place
- Acceptance is conditional.
- Tolerance is conditional and only part of a two-way bargain based on the stigmatized knowing their place.

### **The individual can then**

- Turn to the Out-Group; therefore, they label him "mature, with good personal adjustment capabilities."
- Turn away from the Out-Group; therefore, they label him as "impaired, rigid, and defensive."

An extremely revealing insight from Goffman is that: "Any mutual adjustment and mutual approval between two individuals can be fundamentally embarrassed if one of the partners accepts in full the offer that the other appears to make; every "positive" relationship is conducted under implied promises of consideration and aid such that the relationship would be injured were these credits actually drawn on."

## Chapter 4 – The Self and Its Other

### *Overview of Chapter 4*

*This intriguing title seems to invite us to make the link between what on the surface appear to be two discrete entities – “The Stigmatized” and “The Normal.” The author leads us to consider “the other half” of ourselves and that we are at once both stigmatized and normal from any number of perspectives. Goffman seems to want us to see that all participants in Society can be seen as both characters in the social stigmatization drama. He invites us to see that these concepts can be profitably used if understood as two perspectives, two points of view, and two vantage points of experience, whose critical lessons and “awareness” are mandatory if full adaptation is to occur in a society with norms and deviances from those norms. Goffman argues that Stigma Management is a general feature of society, a process occurring wherever there are identity norms. He considers these patterns of response and adaptation as necessary in every individual’s toolkit of adaptation to encounters within a mixed society. Goffman wants to propose that the concept of Deviation can be a bridge between the study of stigma and the study of the rest of the social world.*

One can imagine a Bell Curve with standard deviations being marked on its x-axis. Those closest to the center, the highest point of the Bell, can be considered as

- Ordinary deviations from the common

While those outlying areas at the extremes of the curve can be considered as

- Uncommon deviations from the ordinary

Goffman makes the point that “normals” may at best be seen not as perfect or ideal but merely as ordinary deviations from the common. The “common” are societal norms, be they existing or imagined as ideals, expressed or not, institutionalized, assumed, or unconsciously held. Goffman holds that “General Identity values of a society may be fully entrenched nowhere and yet they can cast some shadow on encounters everywhere.”

The author suggests that Identity Norms breed deviations as well as conformance. He then goes on to distinguish between **conformance** and **compliance** and the resultant subtlety of whether the issue is one of the individual’s **condition** or the individual’s **will**.

Goffman outlines the dynamics behind the Normative Predicament: the problem of unsustained norms and possible outcomes of that predicament. He outlines three orientations or places in which an individual may wish to locate himself to handle the predicament:

1. Tacitly accept the unreconciled dichotomy and participate as a member in a social category that supports the existence of the unsustainable norms in question, but is generally recognized by itself and others ... as not being the relevant category **that needs to realize the norm** in question and put it into practice; in other words, maneuvering oneself into a group that can expect others to hold to a norm while excusing itself from that same norm and somehow accepting that convention (at best) or hypocrisy (at worst).
2. Given a realization that identity norms can't be attained perfectly and that you yourself cannot attain that norm in question, even to societal standards, to resign oneself to considering that the only recourse is to withdraw from society.
3. To adapt by becoming more aware of both the norms and your "self" and thus to be able to design skill sets to execute patterns of response and adaptation to encounters where gaps are exposed between norms and reality. As Goffman points out, "passing and covering are involved, providing the student with a special application of the arts of impression management, the arts, basic in social life, through which the individual exerts strategic control over the image of himself and his products that others glean from him ... Also involved is a form of tacit cooperation between normals and the stigmatized ..."

Goffman invites normals to be aware of the third option as everyone is affected by the Normative Predicament. He states, "The most fortunate of normals is likely to have his half-hidden failing, and for every little failing there is a social occasion when it will loom large, creating a shameful gap between virtual and actual social identity." He continues to say, "Aliveness to the role of the other must be sufficient so that when certain adaptive tactics are not employed by one of the normal-stigmatized pair, the other will know how to step in and take on the role."

Goffman returns to his main thesis:

"Stigma involves not so much a set of individuals who can be separated into two piles, the stigmatized and the normal, as a pervasive two-role social process in which every individual participates in both roles, at least in some connections and in some phases of life. The normal and the stigmatized are not persons but rather perspectives. These are generated in social situations during mixed contacts by virtue of the unrealized norms that are likely to play upon the encounter."

## Chapter 5 – Deviations and Deviance

### *Overview of Chapter 5*

*This chapter discusses contemplations about the relationship between the specific study of Stigma versus general social studies on sociological issues whose core dynamic relates to deviations and deviance. The point is made that the lessons from the specific study of Stigma can be applied to the understanding of other social issues related to deviations and deviance in a context of addressing normative dilemmas. In so doing, students can focus on what distinguishes these other social challenges while seeing that one of the aspects they have in common is addressed by considerations of Stigma and its management.*

Goffman conceives a group of individuals to be those who

- Share some values
- Adhere to a set of social norms

Those who do not adhere to the norms are conceived as

- “Deviators,” whose peculiarity of mismatch is termed the “deviation”; there exists the possibility that such deviations can lead to “re-identification” of the deviators and increased subsequent risk of stigmatization.

The author stresses the shifting varieties and meaning of deviation possible depending on the context and scale of the group.

Goffman examines the following group “system of reference” scales:

### **Small, family-like groups**

Goffman examines the following contexts of deviation in small, family-like groups where the biographical data of the deviator is widely known or available:

- High rank within a small, close-knit group
- High rank within a large group
- The in-group deviant
  - The village idiot, small town drunk, etc. who is very much considered as part of the group even if it is an ambivalent inclusion
- The group isolate
  - Constantly in social situations with the group but is NOT considered by the group as one of their own

### **Face-to-face local scales**

- Instances of specialized roles that can be positively or negatively out of step with the ordinary morality of the times
  - Minister/priest roles
  - Law officers

### **Metropolitan scales**

Disaffiliates have five main aspects. They are those who

1. Decline voluntarily and openly to accept the social place accorded to them
2. Act irregularly and somewhat rebelliously in connection with our basic institutions
3. Are engaged in some kind of collective denial of the social order
4. Are perceived as failing to use available opportunities for advancement in the various approved runways of society
5. Represent failures in the motivational schemes of society

Disaffiliates can be considered to be of three types:

- Eccentrics and “characters” – those who take a stand on their own
- Cultists
  - Those whose activity is collective and focused within some building or place
  - Those who consider themselves not merely equal to but superior to others and
  - Some of these cultists acquire converts by proposing alternative programs of action.
- Social Deviants
  - Are those who come together in a sub-community or milieu
  - Express a collective denial of the social order, which reflects a failure in the motivational schemes of society.
  - Some of these can provide models of being for restless normals, obtaining not only sympathy but also recruits to their lifestyles.

Goffman proposes a field of inquiry called “Deviance” and considers Social Deviants, as defined above, to be its core.

Social Deviants include the following peripheral instances:

- Political radicals

- The traveling rich
- The ethnic assimilation backsliders
- The metropolitan unmarried and merely married who disavail themselves of an opportunity to raise a family ... and support a vague society against the family system.

Goffman then distinguishes between those who openly show disaffiliation and those who are quietly disaffiliated and make little if any show of it, such as dedicated hobbyists who have all but withdrawn from society except for the necessary civil attachments.

Goffman raises the issue of communities of social deviants. These deviant communities can constitute a haven of self-defense and a place where the individual deviator can openly take the line that he is at least as good as anyone else.

In considering the concept of deviant communities, Goffman draws our attention to two types of social category among many that have been studied:

1. Groups of ethnic and racial minorities
2. Members of the lower class

Goffman points out that among many social categories,

- In-group deviants
- Social deviants
- Minority members
- Lower-class persons

“... are all likely on occasion to find themselves functioning as stigmatized individuals, unsure of the reception awaiting them in face to face interaction and deeply involved in the various responses to this plight.”

Goffman also highlights the plight of disadvantaged persons who are not stigmatized at all.

He states, “A full consideration of any one of these leads beyond, and away from, what it is necessary to consider in the analysis of stigma.” Goffman concludes by saying, “An extraction has thus been made from the traditional fields of social problems, race and ethnic relations, social disorganization, criminology, social pathology, and deviancy – an extraction of something all these fields have in common.” This extraction has been observed by Goffman under the title *STIGMA – Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*.