

interpersonal conduct. To borrow from Goffman, adults thereby build certain elements of behavior into children so that their performance of interpersonal rituals becomes virtually automatic and "only natural." For example, the child who once could not help but stare at strangers is eventually embarrassed when caught doing so. The maintenance of orderly social life across generations depends on children's acquisition of just such a second nature.

As [Erving] Goffman (1971:63) [once] observed, in our contemporary . . . society rituals performed to stand-ins for supernatural entities may be everywhere in decay, yet there remain

. . . brief rituals one individual performs for and to another, attesting to civility and good will on the performer's part and the recipient's possession of a small patrimony of sacredness.

In an important sense, our routine performance of such interpersonal rituals, and the belief in the sacredness of the human personality which those rituals implicitly express, unite members of our contemporary civil society into a single, albeit fragile, moral community. . . .

If, [therefore], our contemporary civil society is to retain its distinctive moral shape, then successive generations of initiates into that society must be mobilized as self-regulating performers of . . . interpersonal rituals. . . . That requires that they do somewhat more than simply learn the code of ceremonial conduct, which we commonly call etiquette. In a sense, they must have certain elements of behavior "built into them." As Goffman (1955:45) noted, they must be taught to

. . . be perceptive, to have feelings attached to self and a self expressed through face, to have pride, honor, dignity, to have considerateness, to have tact and a certain amount of poise.

By implication, the process through which initiates into our contemporary civil society acquire such ritual competence is the most fundamental socialization of all, since they thereby learn about

17. Children's Socialization to Civility

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In the preceding selection, Goffman suggests that individuals must sustain an expressive order if they are to lead meaningful social lives. What he calls interpersonal rituals are the cornerstones of that expressive order. They provide for predictable social encounters and the establishment of mutual trust. Their central importance is perhaps most apparent in public places where strangers who have no other basis for trusting one another routinely meet and interact. They can do so without fear and conflict, by demonstrating their commitment to a shared but implicit code of ritual or ceremonial conduct. What we commonly call interpersonal etiquette is more than mere manners. It is the moral foundation of social life.

Young children's interpersonal conduct often demonstrates why. Although we sometimes consider children's lack of concern with interpersonal niceties refreshing, we seldom do so when we are victims of their brutal honesty, disregard for personal privacy, and carelessness. The hurt feelings, angry resentment, and painful collisions that children sometimes cause are reminders of what social life would be like if everyone ignored etiquette. Children's socialization to civility is clearly of some importance.

That is the topic of this selection. Its specific focus is how children learn to perform interpersonal rituals in public places. Ironically, children's extensive training in interpersonal etiquette is primarily a consequence of their violations of that etiquette. In response to such expressive deviance, adults who accompany children in public instruct them in interpersonal etiquette, encourage them to perform interpersonal rituals, and test their knowledge of appropriate

the nature they are to have as actors. . . .
(Goffman 1971:157)

The remainder of this article is concerned with young children's socialization to civility in public settings. Over a two-year period, several research assistants and I spent a total of nearly 300 hours observing young children in such public settings as city streets, shopping malls, parks, restaurants, and laundromats at various locations in the Northeastern United States. . . . The following analysis of the process through which children acquire ritual competence in public settings is [based on our observations].

Socialization to Civility in Public Settings

The fact that young children typically are accompanied by an adult caretaker in public settings virtually insures that children will routinely witness competent performances of interpersonal rituals. Yet, as Bandura (1986:56) has noted, "people cannot learn much by observation unless they attend to, and accurately perceive, the relevant aspects" of the observed activities. By implication, therefore, young children will not learn much from their caretakers' example unless they attend to the ceremonially relevant aspects of their caretakers' behavior and interactions with others. However, young children's caretakers seldom interrupt their own or others' public activities in order to direct their charges' attention to ceremonially relevant aspects of those activities. For the most part, they only do so in response to their charges' disruptive or otherwise offensive acts.

Instruction

In their attempts to contain and repair their charges' disruptions and threatened disruptions of the ceremonial order of public life, young children's public caretakers often explicitly or implicitly instruct their charges regarding ritually important aspects of behavior in public places. For example, in our urban society, one of the most frequently performed negative inter-

personal rituals is what Goffman (1963:84) called "civil inattention." That is, unacquainted persons visually express regard for one another by giving each other enough visual notice to demonstrate their appreciation of the other's presence, and then withdraw their attention to indicate that the other is not a target of special curiosity or design. Instead of immediately withdrawing attention from others, however, young children often intrusively stare at those with whom they are unacquainted, as illustrated by the following incident which was observed at a fast-food restaurant.

A woman is sitting across a table from an approximately five-year-old girl. The girl is looking intently at a man who is sitting at the table directly behind the woman and facing the girl. The woman looks up from the sandwich she is eating, glances over her shoulder, and tells the girl: "C—, it's not polite to stare."

Clearly, the girl's failure to give the man "civil inattention" occasioned her caretaker's announcement that "it's not polite to stare." Similar to this woman, young children's public caretakers commonly respond to their charges' ceremonially inappropriate conduct with such "rule statements" (Wooten 1986). They thereby implicitly identify the child's prior or present action as a delict, and inform or remind him or her of the violated rule of ceremonial conduct.

The code of ceremonial conduct which adults commonly sustain in public places is typically unspoken, however. Thus, even though young children's public caretakers may readily recognize and decisively respond to their charges' violations of that code of conduct, they often have difficulty articulating and explaining its constituent rules, as the following incident illustrates.

While a woman is inspecting cans on a supermarket shelf, an approximately four-year-old boy leaves her side, walks over to a shelf on the opposite side of the aisle, picks up a piece of previously used chewing gum, and starts to put it in his mouth. The woman glances over her shoulder and loudly commands the boy to "STOP."

Still holding the gum in his hand, the boy points to the shelf from which he removed the gum and objects that "it was here." The woman responds: "I don't care where you found it. It's been in someone else's mouth."

This incident suggests that, while children may learn to avoid befouling themselves with or exposing others to certain forms of bodily excreta in the course of their toilet training, they must subsequently be taught to generalize that ceremonial proscription to other forms of bodily excreta, such as saliva and to objects contaminated by such substances. Yet the response of the boy's caretaker in the preceding example to his attempted recycling of previously chewed gum does not clearly convey that lesson. She implicitly instructs him that he must not expose himself to something that "has been in someone else's mouth" regardless of where it is found, but does not explain that this particular taboo reflects a more general ceremonial proscription. Indeed, adults' instructions to children concerning rules of ceremonial conduct are typically incomplete and often seem more confusing than enlightening.

As Elias (1939:167) has suggested, adults seem unable to adequately explain the demands they make on behavior when children violate codes of ceremonial conduct, in part, perhaps, because adults conform to such codes of conduct more or less automatically. Moreover . . . rules of ceremonial conduct . . . reflect a shared and taken-for-granted sense of the reasonable, the humane, and the moral. Thus, it is difficult to adequately explain such a code of conduct to those who do not share the taken-for-granted sense of the reasonable, humane, and moral which that code of conduct reflects.

The following conversation between an approximately five-year-old girl (J) and her mother (M) was overheard in a busy laundromat and illustrates adults' difficulties in instructing children regarding civility.

J: Mommy, do you see that baby?

(M does not respond to the question)

J: His face is so fat an . . .

M: DON'T talk so loudly about other people. They might hear you.

J: Heh heh, but the baby won't understand.

M: That's not the point. It's not polite. You have to learn to keep your voice down.

In this conversation, the girl's mother interrupts her daughter's unflattering description of the "baby" and instructs her to take care so as not to be overheard by the subjects of such tactless remarks. However, the girl objects that in this case the subject of the remark would not be offended. In response, the mother declares that such remarks are offensive nonetheless and that the girl must be more discreet. Clearly, this girl had not yet acquired the "protective orientation" toward saving the face of others that characterizes competent members of contemporary civil society (Goffman 1955). Without such a taken-for-granted sense of considerateness and tact, the mother's instructions to the girl seem unreasonable and arbitrary. By implication, this example seems to suggest that the process through which children acquire ritual competence necessarily involves something more than observational learning and instruction.

Coaching

Goffman (1971:108) once observed that in the realm of the ceremonial

. . . it is not obedience and disobedience that are central, but occasions that give rise to remedial work of various kinds, especially the provision of corrective readings calculated to show that a possible offender actually had a right relationship to the rules.

By implication, in order to truly become members of contemporary civil society, children must learn to provide corrective readings for a variety of potentially offensive acts. . . .

As previously noted, young children routinely witness their caretakers' provision of corrective readings. For example,

the following incident was observed in a department store.

An approximately five-year-old girl is running down an aisle and collides with an elderly woman. A young woman comes running to the scene of the collision and addresses both the offender and the victim: "C—, get over here. You know you're not supposed to run around. Sorry. She's a little excited today." The elderly woman stares at the woman, furrows her brow, but does not respond. The younger woman puts her arm over the girl's chest, pulls the girl against her legs, and offers a more elaborate apology: "I'm really sorry. It won't happen again."

Note that in this example the woman not only admonishes the child and promises that such behavior will not reoccur, but also offers an account and apologizes twice in the girl's presence.

However, it is doubtful that children recognize the ceremonial importance of such remedial work simply by observing their caretakers' example, or even that they are expected to provide similar corrective readings for their own acts, as suggested by the following incident which occurred in a large toy store.

A clerk has just stacked a number of boxes containing toy trucks at the end of an aisle and steps back to admire her work. An approximately five-year-old boy comes running around the corner, collides with the stack of boxes, and knocks a number of them to the floor. A man immediately follows the boy around the corner and instructs him to "tell the lady you're sorry." The boy objects that "you're supposed to say that." The man and store clerk laugh. The boy furrows his brow and looks at the floor.

This boy apparently assumed on the basis of past experience that it was not he but his caretaker who should apologize for his disruptive act. In other words, he had not yet learned to assume ceremonial responsibility for his own behavior and, therefore, to provide corrective readings for his own potentially offensive acts.

Despite this boy's failure to apologize to the victim of his negligence, his caretaker's

attempt to prompt him to perform such a remedial act is exemplary of a common response to young children's failures to voluntarily provide corrective readings for their ceremonially offensive acts. For the most part, these prompts or "elicitation routines" have a standard form. The child's public caretaker uses the word "tell" or "say" to signal the child to "repeat the following words in virtually unchanged form" (Greif and Gleason 1980:163). As in the preceding example, often the child is also explicitly instructed as to whom the repeated words should be addressed. Moreover, in addition to using such prompts in an attempt to elicit performances of remedial acts from their charges, young children's public caretakers also prompt their charges to preface requests with "please" and to "say thank you" when an expression of gratitude is ceremonially due. They also employ such prompts as "say hi to the nice man" and "say bye now" in their attempts to encourage their charges to ceremonially open and close interpersonal encounters.

Like many of public caretakers' responses to their charges' ceremonially inappropriate conduct, such explicit prompting of children apparently performs a dual function. Caretakers demonstrate to witnesses that they are ceremonially responsible actors, while simultaneously encouraging children to practice performing some ceremonial routine. Yet such explicit prompting may be relatively ineffective in teaching children to voluntarily fulfill ceremonial expectations. It may simply teach them to perform ceremonial routines in response to their caretakers' prompts, rather than in response to the kind of interpersonal circumstances that occasion such prompting (Greif and Gleason 1980).

Children's public caretakers not only explicitly prompt performances of ceremonial routines when their charges fail to voluntarily fulfill ceremonial expectations, but also employ what Goffman (1971) appropriately termed "priming moves." For example, the following incident concretely illustrates Goffman's (1971:157) more general observation that a child's failure to

provide a corrective reading for ceremonially inappropriate conduct often leads to a halt in the proceedings, this accomplished by an adult's use of the common priming move, "what do you say?"

A man, a woman, and two boys are sitting around a table in a fast-food restaurant. One of the boys belches so loudly that the diners who are sitting at nearby tables glance at the boy. The woman immediately asks the boy: "What do you say?" He smiles and answers: "Excuse me."

Clearly, unlike explicit prompting, the use of such a priming move by a child's public caretaker does not simply encourage the child to perform some ceremonial routine. It also requires the child to determine which such routine to perform.

By implication, the use of priming moves by children's public caretakers implicitly tests their charges' understanding of ceremonially appropriate responses to different kinds of interpersonal events. For example, the following occurred in a fast-food restaurant.

An approximately four-year-old girl who is sitting at a table across from a man loudly announces that she "wants ketchup." The man informs her that "daddy will get it," walks to the service counter and quickly returns with two small packets. While still standing, he holds the packets in front of the girl but slightly out of her reach and asks: "What do you say?" She quickly responds, "Thank you," and the man gives her the packets.

Like this man, children's public caretakers often withhold or encourage others to withhold some indulgence from their charges until they pass the implicit tests posed by the caretakers' priming moves. Such dramatizations of the potential consequences of failing to perform ritual acts when situationally appropriate may well encourage children to voluntarily do so in the future.

In summary, children's ceremonially deviant acts are essential elements of the process through which they are socialized to civility. . . . Specifically, children's ceremonial deviance occasions remedial work

by their caretakers which children observe, instructions to children regarding conventionalized expressions of interpersonal respect and regard, and the use of prompts and priming moves to encourage children to actively transform their ceremonially deviant acts into expected forms of ritual conduct.

Conclusion

Clearly, the preceding is not a comprehensive analysis of the process through which initiates into our contemporary civil society acquire ritual competence. It did not address the components of that process which typically occur in private settings, such as family homes, nor the contribution of children's own peer groups to their socialization to civility. . . . Yet the preceding analysis does provide some important insights into the functions and expressive significance of the young's ceremonial deviance. . . .

[A number of] others . . . have previously argued that deviance cannot be dismissed simply as pathological or disruptive, because in controlled quantities it actually promotes social stability. That is, deviance provides occasions for societal members to reaffirm the moral boundary which both binds them together and separates them from those who are not part of their moral community. No doubt children's ceremonial deviance performs a similar function. Their disruptive and offensive acts serve to remind adults of what they must not do nor allow others to do, if the ceremonial order of contemporary civil society is to be maintained. Moreover, the preceding analysis demonstrates that children's ceremonial deviance contributes to the stability of our contemporary civil society in yet another way. That is, it occasions responses from adults that serve to intergenerationally transmit the code of ceremonial conduct around which the distinctive moral shape of our contemporary civil society is fashioned. . . .

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