

We are each other

Something I find fascinating is the concept of understanding why people act the way that they do. Why are some of us different from others and what contributes to our personalities or the way we present ourselves? A sociologist named Erving Goffman uses an analogy in his writing *Presentation of Self* (1956) called “the stage” which alludes to us acting as characters for the presentation of self. I find that his perception of the self is like putting on a performance depending on who you are around. Similarly another sociologist named Charles Horton Cooley has a theory called ‘the looking glass self’. He describes this theory by saying that the way we view ourselves is through the lens of others and we alter ourselves only based on what the people around us will think. Although there are some differences in each sociologist's concepts, both theories can allow us to better understand what makes us who we are. It begs the question of if we even have our own individuality, or does it purely stem from the people we are around.

The way we act is subjective based on who we are around. Obviously in a work environment you will assume more professional behavior than you would at home or with your friends. This concept ties to Goffman's ‘stage’ theory where we interpret our environment and then depict our role in that environment which determines how we act. Goffman uses the terms “front stage” and “back stage”. Goffman states, “There will be a back region with its tools for shaping the body, and front region with its fixed props.”(1956). The front stage being your performance at work meaning, acting in a calculated way to let others perceive you the way you

An example of your back stage is the way you act with close family and friends. Another aspect of 'the stage' is how the audience reacts. Goffman states, "He often manifests a gregarious desire for teammates and audiences... and he has a capacity for deeply felt shame, leading him to minimize the chance he takes of exposure." (1956). Meaning although we have the desire to be a part of something and receive reactions from others, exposure of embarrassment or anxiety can deter us. All of these performances create who you are into a character through the eyes of someone else.

I think Cooley has a similar theory on why we act the way we do. His concept called the 'looking glass self' refers to us only dressing certain ways or acting differently because of the people we are around. We don't actually care what we think of ourselves but we do in fact care about how our friends and family will perceive us. I also believe society's standards have a lot to do with the 'looking glass self'. Societal standards contribute to the way we want to look and act because those things are what society holds to be valuable. We want to "fit in" in a sense by doing things that others will accept. Cooley writes, "so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it." (1902). When we see ourselves, we picture us being viewed by people we hold valuable. When we think about how that makes us feel when they see us, and determine if it's a good or bad judgment. The feeling associated with this ultimately conditions who we are in our own minds, although it's through the perspective of someone else. This seems contradicting but this concept is justified. Cooley says, "We always imagine and in imagining share, the judgments of the other mind." (1902).

and are always “putting on a performance” at least for the front stage. Although, the backstage I believe does show your true self, or more of it. There are many similarities between the two concepts. When looking at Cooley’s theory, he is describing altering yourself to better ‘fit in’ which is comparable to presenting yourself differently on the ‘front stage’. Differences in these start to appear when you look a little deeper into the interpretation. The way Goffman describes his theory is almost like you intentionally are putting on an act all or most of the time. The wording that alludes to this is when he describes humans as performers and characters, “whose spirit, strength, and other sterling qualities the performance was designed to evoke.” (1956). We view ourselves one way and try to prove that to others. Cooley, on the other hand, leaves the impression in his writing that making ourselves appear a certain way to enhance the way we are perceived by others, is more inherently done. You can see this when he states, “This is evident from the fact that the character and the weight of the other, in whose mind we see ourselves, make all the difference with our feeling.” (1902). I feel that Cooley is saying that the way we present ourselves has to be a certain way or else we feel ashamed, or cowardly because of other people's opinions. It's almost as if you have no choice unless you want to feel bad about yourself.

In conclusion, based on Cooley and Goffman's theory of what creates our identities, there are similarities based on the fact that the people around us do create who we are as a person. If we lived isolated with nobody but ourselves, I don’t think we would care much about what we look like or even how we act. So do we actually even have our own identities or is it solely based on others? Goffman's theory of the stage more so creates the idea that we can have our own identities considering his standpoint on the ‘backstage’. Cooley's theory makes it harder to think of a circumstance where our true identities come into play. The only way that Cooley's concept

others. The overarching idea that comes from the two sociological concepts leads me to determine that the people we are around do in fact create who we are even if we are no longer around them. People leave an impression on us, good or bad, which then shapes us into who we are today.