

Christopher Elliot

October 17th, 2021

SOC-105-001

The Presentation of Self in College

The transition from high school to college could be considered one of the most challenging, yet rewarding experiences that an individual can embark on in life. It is also one of the biggest changes that an individual can experience. Living in a new and much smaller space, being responsible for your own things and actions without an adult to help or back you up, and leaving behind most of your relationships with friends and family are all examples of the struggle to determine how to identify between the person you were in high school and the person you want to become in college, or if you even want to change yourself at all. A helpful aspect of the identity struggle when starting the new phase of college is the probability that there is a very small to nonexistent group of people that actually know your initial self pre-college. But in having no one to help establish the identity and personality that you started with, aren't we able to change how we present ourselves in this environment of new people and new things? Through changing your presentation of self, it is possible to create a new image of yourself as an individual to display in the brand-new setting of college.

One of the most freeing and complicated aspects of beginning college is having to choose what kind of person you want to be and what actions to take and decisions to make to get there. Unlike living at home in high school, there aren't as many parents, teachers, or rules to limit you, especially in your social life. You can choose to take the classes that interest you the most, create your own day-to-day schedule, and interact with peers that you haven't known or lived near

under your control, there are also more opportunities to meet a variety of people and form new relationships. College represents a place to find yourself, or in some cases, a place to reinvent yourself.

Because of the expanded social opportunities that college provides, reinventing yourself may not be as hard as it seems. One of the most prominent opportunities for reinventing yourself in college is within your new permanent living space for the academic year; the dormitories. College dormitories are known to be somewhat cramped and full of activity due to the majority of students living in one location. For most students there is the change from having their own room to sharing with one or more roommates, the possibility of having suitemates depending on type of dorm, neighbors on the same hall or other halls, and on other floors of the building. Outside of the dorms, there are even more opportunities for social interactions and getting to put yourself out there as an individual, such as organized activities through the Resident Assistants, campus events, classes, sporting events, and dining locations on campus.

Using any of these opportunities, it could be fairly simple to start college with the mindset of wanting to project a certain image or personality for yourself. You get to choose what personal information you want to share with the new people you meet, especially if you want to act or try to be different from the personality you were recognized for prior to college. There is an opening for building a new reputation, which can be done through attempting to control how and what situations you want to take part in in order to create a new presentation of yourself that you can then present to the unfamiliar scene of college.

The sociological concept of the presentation of self was created by sociologist Erving Goffman and involves looking at how the self is split into two main parts; an internal self and an

true personality of an individual, but the part of self that represents all of the intrinsic characteristics or qualities that an individual would want to display as having to the outside world, such as compassion or respectfulness. According to Goffman, the relationship between these internal and external parts of self can be analyzed and defined through a metaphor about theater. The internal part of self is labeled as ‘the character’ and affects the external self that is ‘the performer’ by telling the performing part of self what characteristics the individual wants to project to the outside world or audience. The interactions between the character and the performer are involved mainly in helping the individual produce an overall social self that they can use and maintain in social situations and interactions with other people.

The individual's internal and external selves then technically give a performance in each social situation, where the performer is trying to present the character to the audience to the best of its ability. This is true for all individuals in a given situation; each needs to know the role or performance that they are trying to play and need to recognize the role of others in order for the situation or interaction to be considered successful. All of the components, individuals involved, and setting are considered to be a part of creating a single definition to be used to describe and set roles for those participating in the situation. The definition then can be used by the performers to express their roles correctly so that discomfort can be avoided. The performance of the individual can also be broken up into a front and back stage setting. A back stage is considered a situation or space where the individual and its selves can prepare for an actual social performance; getting ready with a specific outfit or makeup, picking out a backpack or other item to be used in a social situation, etc. On the other side of the theater setup is the front stage; the area where the social situation actually occurs in the real world.

we create in social interactions is the capacity for a good or bad performance by the individuals and the changes that can occur to our reputations and performers. In the event of a bad performance there are no completely damaging consequences to the performer, but there can be symptoms of embarrassment for the performer itself and for the other individuals involved. In situations that are more public, the symptoms could be even more extreme because of the dread and possible anxiety that can come from performing in front of an even bigger audience with larger expectations for a good performance. In order for the performer to avoid future embarrassment, the performer can learn from performance mistakes and figure out a way to improve their projection of the character and traits they wish to show.

Creating a new and improved presentation of self is possible in college due to the extended list of social opportunities. The primary purpose of the interactions between the character and the performer is to attempt to present the desired character traits into the social situation so that it is linked to be a part of your personality to those involved in the situation. There is always the aspiration to put our best foot forward for our reputation in social situations, meaning that the performer wants to put on the best performance possible in order to construct the social situation and role that they wish to be playing. An example of projecting the best possible version of yourself through your performer is by taking part in activities that would not normally be associated with you and your personality. Taking the initiative to introduce yourself to the other people in your dorm, class, etc. and using character traits such as humor and friendliness in an attempt to successfully make a social connection through defining the interaction as amiable.

intended, it is very possible that there will be a sense of discomforting embarrassment for all of the individuals involved for the remainder of the situation and possibly after. Saying the wrong thing, making a bad joke, wearing or doing something that does not fit into the situation are all examples of how a performer's presentation can go awry. The other individuals involved can make note of the bad performance and the performer can be defined as awkward or unable to fit in and cause the prospect of the college relationship or friendship to be questionable. We want to come across as someone that our peers want to spend time with by demonstrating tolerance, showing empathy, being able to have fun or have a good sense of humor, and acting with kindness to be seen as capable of being a good friend.

There is also plenty of room for an individual to allow its character and performer to prepare for the social situations that college provides. From the back stage, the individual can debate on which clothing to wear each day at events such as class, a hangout, and parties. There can also be mental preparation for class in terms of going over where to sit and with whom, as well as deciding how you want your academic reputation to come across towards your friends and professors. Each of the back stage decisions that an individual makes can be important for the confidence and possible success of the performance that will then occur on a front stage when the individual puts themselves in an actual social situation on campus.

In summary, college can be considered one of the biggest changes in life because of the many different opportunities for self-determination, including how to present ourselves. College represents a new environment to live in and experience ourselves in, and gives us the option to alter how we want to be perceived by adjusting or completely transforming our character traits and personality. This can be related to the sociological concept of the presentation of self that

‘performer’ that interact and perform during all of our social experiences. The two parts of self can modify their interactions and external display in social situations in order to organize the best possible performance outcomes. Understanding the way that the components of your presentation of self affect how you interact in your environment in turn allows individuals to try to curate their best college experience.