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# *SECTION III:*

## *The Self and Symbolic Interaction*

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# Outline

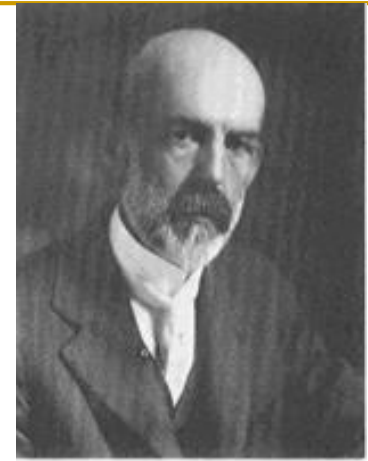
- The Divided Self
  - Charles H. Cooley
    - The looking glass self
  - George Herbert Mead
    - The “I” and the “me”
    - Particular others and the generalized other
  - W.E.B. Du Bois
    - The Veil
    - Double Consciousness
    - The Contradiction of Double Aims
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# The Divided Self

- **SELF:** not preexisting. Self is socially constructed – during interaction and as a result of social forces
    - In part, created by what we think others think of us
  - Result: the self always in some ways divided – split into different components
  - True for everyone, but especially those at the margins of society
- \*\* Do you think this is an accurate picture of human experience?*
- \*\* Why would marginality intensify the divided self?*
- \*\* In what ways do non-marginalized people feel divided?*

# Cooley's Looking Glass Self

- **Charles Cooley (1864-1929)**
- The divided self: essential to all self consciousness
- Looking glass self:



*Charles Horton Cooley*

“ As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; **so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, characters, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it.**”

(Cooley p. 189 or Cahill p. 27)

# Three elements

1. “the imagination of our appearance to the other person”
2. “the imagination of his [or her] judgment of that appearance”
3. “some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification.”

“The thing that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment, **the imagined effect of this reflection** upon another’s mind.” (Cooley p. 189)

- \*\* *How does this metaphor work in practice??? (Think about what we do when we stand in front of the **mirror**...)*
- \* *How often do people base their self-concept upon what other people think of them?*
- \*\* *Is it possible to ever get free of the looking-glass self?*

# The changeable self

“We are ashamed or feel evasive in the presence of a straightforward man, cowardly in the presence of a brave one, gross in the eyes of a refined one, and so on. We always imagine, and **in imagining share, the judgments of the other mind.**” (Cooley p. 189)

*\*\* Can you give examples of when you have changed how you feel about yourself in accordance with who you are talking to?*

*\*\* Is there such a thing as a steady personality?*

*\*\* What does this suggest about our “self-feeling” (in Cooley’s words) or self-confidence?? Insecurity??*

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# Mead's theory of the self

## George Herbert Mead (1863-1931)



George H. Mead

- Son of a clergyman; mother was president of Mt. Holyoke College
- BAs from Oberlin and Harvard
- Studied in Germany (Hmmm... dialectics?)
- Taught at the University of Chicago, 1892-1931
- Involved in many reform campaigns: women's suffrage, education, labor, etc.
- Most famous book: *Mind, Self and Society*: published posthumously (only lecture notes)

# The I and the Me

- Beyond Cooley: not just the internalized views of others
  - Socially defined self = **Me** (based on expectations of others)
  - Spontaneous, freely acting self = **I**

**Me: the organized attitudes of others that the individual assumes as part of his/her self**

“It is that self which is able to maintain itself in the community, that is recognized in the community insofar as it recognizes the others.” (Mead, p. 171)

- \*\* *What are some different “Me’s” that define your self?*
- \*\* *What is potentially positive or negative about the Me?*

**Me:** the organized attitudes of others that the individual assumes as part of his/her self

“It is that self which is able to maintain itself in the community, that is recognized in the community insofar as it recognizes the others.” (Mead, p. 171)

**I:** the unorganized, spontaneous disposition to act

“The ‘I’ is the response of the individual to the attitude of the community as this appears in his own experience. His response to that organized attitude in turn changes it.” (Mead, p. 171)

**\*\* *Why is the distinction between the I and the Me important?***

**\*\* *What would happen if our selves were completely determined by the attitudes of others?***

**\*\* *Can one’s “I” and one’s “me” be split?? In contradiction, in tension, or divided? HOW??***

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# Self-interaction

- The self is involved in a **double dialogue**:
  - **Internally**: between the I and the Me
  - **Externally**: between the self and the social world
- This dialogue is possible because the self is both a **subject** and an **object**

“The individual experiences himself...only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience.”

(Mead, p. 169)

- \*\* *What do we gain from being objects to ourselves?*
- \*\* *How does this take place over time? I.e. when we think about our PAST selves???*

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# Internal conversation

- Communication depends on being able to respond to oneself as one responds to others:

“[...] it is where [...] he not only hears himself but responds to himself, talks and replies to himself as truly as the other person applies to him, that we have behavior in which the individuals become objects to themselves.”  
(Mead p. 169).

**\*\* *Why do people talk to themselves? What personal and social purpose does this serve?***

## - SELF-CHARACTERS

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# The temporal character of self-interaction

- “the ‘I’ in memory is there as the spokesman of the self of the second, the minute, or the day ago. As given, it is a ‘me’ but it is a ‘me’ which was the ‘I’ at the earlier time. If you ask, then, where directly in your own experience the ‘I’ comes in, the answer is that it comes in as a historical figure.”

- Mead [1934] 1967

# Particular and Generalized Other

Three stages of the development of the self:

1. **PRE-PLAY:** meaningless, imitative activity; no sense of the other
2. **PLAY STAGE:** role-playing; putting oneself in position of another (playing “mother,” for example)
  - **PARTICULAR OTHER:** seeing (oneself) from the point of view of a particular other person
3. **GAME STAGE:** complex games; organized roles of several players at once (imaginary friends)
  - **GENERALIZED OTHER:** seeing (oneself) from the point of view of the organized attitudes of the whole community

**\*\* *In what other contexts do we see from the point of view of the whole community? What difference does it make?***

# The mature self

“The mature self arises when a generalized other is **internalized** so that the **community exercises control** over the conduct of its individuals...The structure, then, on which the self is built is this response which is common to all, **for one has to be a member of a community to be a self.**” (Wallace & Wolf, p. 202 [this is not a required reading for the course]).

- \*\* What are the possible positive or negative effects of the internalization of the “generalized other”?*
- \*\* What happens when society is an oppressive place?*

**MEAD argues that our sense of self is a SOCIAL STRUCTURE!**

**What does he mean by this??**

# Gender and the self

- How are boys and girls socialized to view their selves differently?

**Boys:** Particular others? generalized others?

**Girls:** Particular others? generalized others?

***\*\* How does media come into play?***

***\*\* The body and body image are important aspects of the self-concept. How does body image factor into boy's selves and girls selves? Similarly? Differently?***

***\*\* What are the implications of different socialization of boys and girls for the broader society?***

## W.E.B. Du Bois. The Veil

“Then it dawned on me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others, or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but **shut out from their world by a vast veil**. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil to creep through; I held all beyond it in **common contempt**, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows... Alas, with the years all this fine contempt began to fade; **for the words I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine**. But they should not keep these prizes, I said; some, all, I would wrest from them.” (Du Bois p. 164)



*\*\* What does Du Bois mean by the “veil”? Why does he have mixed emotions about it?*

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# Double-consciousness

“After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and **gifted with second-sight** in this American world – a world which yields him **no true self-consciousness**, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this **double-consciousness**, this sense of **always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity**. One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” (Du Bois p. 164)

*\*\*What does he mean by “second sight”? What are the sources and consequences of this “double-consciousness”?*

*\*\* Does double-consciousness exist within gender relations? For children?*

## “The contradiction of double aims”

“This waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy to **unreconciled ideals**, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people – has sent them often wooing **false gods** and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them **ashamed of themselves**.” (Du Bois p. 165)

- \* *What are these double aims? Why are they experienced as conflicting? Are they inevitably irreconcilable?*
- \*\* *Is it difficult for marginalized people to feel like they know their “true selves”? Is this experienced by other people and groups as well?*