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LOSING YOURSELF: CULTS, GREEKS, AND SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF SELF
AND IDENTITY

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A Senior Honors Thesis Submitted for Fulfillment
of the Honors Degree Program Requirements

May 2021

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Rollins College

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INTRODUCTION

My personal interest in identity negotiation and formation inspired my intellectual curiosity, which blossomed into the backbone of my theoretical Honors thesis, or what I refer to as the study of the ‘self’. This thesis is based on examining how we, as individuals, understand the conception of our ‘selves’ in the context of powerful groups. I was initially fascinated with the possibility that an individual could identify so strongly with a group that they forget about their morality, individuality, and sense of humanity—or redefines these values in order to fit into a group. Thinking first about hazing in fraternities and sororities, I sought to understand an aspect of the Bystander Effect, curious about the formation of identity through symbolic boundary: Where does one ‘draw the line’? How does the individual see him or herself within the hierarchy of such a potentially punitive group? If they do, how does the individual separate him or herself from the group? Because hazing is difficult to study, especially due to the implications of a pandemic on empirical research, and because re-socialization into a powerful group is common, I refocused my area of study to be centered around the conception of the ‘self’ more broadly within these powerful groups. When referencing powerful groups, I mean types of organizations that insist upon affecting the individual’s identity. This includes cults, or New Religious Movements (NRMs), but can be further extended to other areas of interest, such as fraternities and sororities, collectively known as Greek Life because these institutions fit into a framework for an organization that encourages its members to think of themselves as a collective as opposed to individuals—changing the way members see him/her/themselves.

To effectively study the self, it’s important to first understand why this thesis is based in the sociological perspective as well as to take a look at available sociological theories of self.

Sociology, or the study of society, differs from psychology, or the study of how individuals think and behave, because sociology can encompass structural, cultural, group, as well as individual interaction. In popular culture, we often refer to, and think of, the ‘self’ as being a natural or essential phenomenon; we don’t think of our ‘selves’ as having social implications or as being an ongoing project, although we interact with others using our identities every single day. While psychology is important to understanding the ‘self’ because it gives preliminary understanding to the ‘self’ as an object and is even included in aspects of theory introduced in later chapters, sociology is the primary lens used in this thesis. Sociology connects the individual back to the external context, providing a greater range of theory and adding social dynamics to the ‘self’ that would not be possible using psychology alone—this includes, but isn’t limited to, examining individual level social interactions, examining the social and political structure of the powerful group, and analyzing how emotions impact interaction and identity.

This thesis will use different sociological theories on the ‘self’ to examine the above elements, beginning with a chapter on classical sociological theory on the self, followed by a chapter on contemporary sociological theory, a chapter on dramaturgical and related theories, and ending with a chapter focused on the sociological examination of emotions. This thesis is primarily a theory project, with some speculation as to how this theory could be applied in these given contexts (NRMs and Greek Life). This thesis does not make use of sociology’s other set of tools –systematic empirical analysis, though it provides guidance for such potential explorations.

Finally, the last step in introducing this Thesis is to introduce preliminary background information related to New Religious Movements and Greek Life. In popular culture, New Religious Movements, due to significant loss of membership in more mainstream religions, have become increasingly more sought out (Melton 1995:271). The significance of cults

(academically known as New Religious Movements) is based on society's reaction to them—starting with arguably, the most influential cult, Jonestown (Melton 1995: 271). Jonestown has been widely used as a template for understanding New Religious Movements (Crockford 2018:96). Thus, because of Jonestown's reputation, cultural and social perceptions of cults were “fueled by fear of what they might do,” based on Jonestown's dark past (Melton 1995:276).

Jonestown was derived from the founder, Jones', belief that, “In 1965, after reading an article on nuclear destruction in Esquire Magazine, ...the end of the world in a nuclear holocaust would occur on 15 July 1967. Concerned for the society that would emerge after this event, he sought to find sanctuary for a small, interracial remnant” (Smith 1982:106). Jones moved his congregation, known as The People's Temple, to Guyana initially for 'safety reasons'. However, it was there that the 'White Night' occurred, “an event that had been previously rehearsed, [which executed] the suicide of every member of Peoples Temple in Jonestown. When it was over, 914 people had died, most by taking a fruit drink mixed with cyanide and tranquilizers; most apparently died voluntarily” (Smith 1982:108). “Jonestown is the archetype for other cults,” insinuating that other NRMs will have the same fate, suggesting cults are no longer harmless, but potentially fatal organizations (Crockford 2018:96). As a result, the term 'cult' has three thematic features: A charismatic leader, whose members are isolated from their former lives, and is a group that utilizes 'brain-washing' or re-socialization techniques (Crockford 2018:95); Furthermore, cults, or NRMs, typically have “first-generation enthusiasms, unambiguous clarity and certainty in belief systems, urgency of message, commitment to a different lifestyle, strong them versus us and or before and after joining distinctions” (Melton 1995: 266). Cults are related to the self, and thus necessary to study in this Thesis, because upon joining, their identities become intertwined

with the group; individuals are seeking social connectedness and a sense of belonging which ultimately impacts one's sense of self (Coates 2012a:170).

Greek life, however, is simpler to discuss because it is particularly salient to American culture, especially in higher education. As opposed to the way sororities and fraternities are portrayed in television and film, additional elements of Greek Life will be discussed further along in this thesis. Sororities and fraternities are a part of Inter-Fraternity Councils and National Panhellenic Organizations that help maintain the responsibility of leadership and act as a liaison between the University and the organization. Sororities and fraternities all utilize a hierarchy model within their organization as well, relying primarily on elected or appointed leaders to guide their respective chapters. These organizations are not unique from cults or NRMs in that they are ritualistic, historical, and occupy their own sub-cultures with certain typical demographics of members. While NRMs are often perceived as societal outsiders, Greek life is just the opposite; the power yielded from Greek Life is that its members are often more affluent and can have a very influential impact on the culture of a college, let alone the powerful social contacts that are reserved for former members. Although NRMs and Greek Life form powerful groups in different ways, they each provide an important perspective to the conception of the self in a group context, which will be laid out in the following chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

The focus of this thesis is to provide a theoretical framework with which we can examine how we, as individuals, understand the conception of our ‘selves’ in the context of powerful groups. By powerful groups, I mean types of organizations that insist upon affecting, and actively changing, the individual’s personal identity. This includes New Religious Movements and can be further extended to other areas of interest, such as Greek Life.

New Religious Movements, known in popular culture as cults, are religious sects that can be identified as "deviant religious organizations with novel beliefs and subcultures" (Crockford 2018:24). It is widely known that “new recruits undergo an identity change process as to align their previous sense of self or identity with the group ‘identity’” in hopes of finding a sense of belonging (Coates 2013b:272). As new members are negotiating these new relationships, they form social bonds and an entirely new social network—transitioning into a new social role than they previously occupied in broader society. Individuals undergo what is referred to as self-change, or “changes in behaviors or social relationships, but can also refer to changes that are ‘deeper’ and emotional in nature” (Coates 2013b:273). Thus, NRMs provide a plethora of opportunity to examine identity negotiations further.

College and University Greek organizations include a vast array of sororities or fraternities on their prospective college campuses. These organizations are stereotypically known for their cult-like rituals, expensive membership costs, social hierarchies, gossip, close-knit relationships, Greek letter affiliations, and social gatherings. Greek organizations serve as a funnel for maintaining the status quo in the college setting as well as providing access for certain individuals to a sense of validation, belonging, and a greater social network. While they don’t

typically separate themselves from broader society like NRMs, Greek organizations still hold an unbelievable amount of power over their respective sorority and fraternity members and are deserving of the title, powerful group.

Sociological theory suggests that identity is developed in the midst of and featured at the forefront of individual level interactions. Therefore, to understand a self, that is heavily engaged with a powerful group, we must draw on theory grounded in symbolic interaction, or social interaction based on the creation of shared meaning from symbols. This body of theory emphasizes a micro-sociological focus on interactions, but also considers structural and cultural challenges that inevitably affect and influence the individual and these interactions.

This chapter will explain how sociologists conceptualize the self, beginning with the earliest sociological theory on the self as a foundation. Although psychology is often used to examine the self, the differences between psychology and sociology are necessary to highlight because, while society (and inherently the study of psychology) tends to understand the self as a basic unit for social interaction—without paying much attention to the ways in which the self develops and what it is affected by—sociology emphasizes the ‘identity work’ and social nature of the self that goes into negotiating and re-negotiating identities. While some contemporary theory on the self, to be discussed in further detail in the next chapter, utilizes psychological concepts, the sociological perspective is unique, and best fit for this thesis, because it provides a cultural component: It lets us closely examine how social (and in this case religious) practices can, and do, significantly affect self-worth, self-esteem, emotional management, motivate group involvement and participation, and dictate an individual’s lived experience.

Firstly, classical theory written by Charles Horton Cooley needs to be examined because Cooley is able to give this thesis insight into a more complicated way to think about what it

means to have a consciousness. His theory is guided by some of the oldest and most basic principles of sociology, yet it still remains useful for new sociological material by relating these concepts to other realms of social life, sympathy and biology.

Cooley, who provides a basis of context for Mead's 'self', suggests that we are influenced heavily by others while similarly sending out "influences of our own" ([1902] 2012:165). We are constantly changing our perception based on our surroundings; it is these surroundings which guide our creation and expression of our 'selves'. Cults, or New Religious Movements, then can be seen as key players in the development of individual self and identity. Individuals who become part of a NRM become of the collective mindset, shaped by the presence of a charismatic leader with a message requiring immediacy. There are countless examples in New Religious Movement history and literature that suggest that the individual members will often cite the group benefit or well-being over their own when asked why they endured certain abuses or trouble.

Cooley ([1902] 2012) also suggests that our "social consciousness is inseparable from our self-consciousness" (166). We cannot disconnect our individual selves from the presence of some social group and it is because of this that we participate in sympathetic introspection— this process "...allows others to awake in [themselves] a life similar..." to that of the individual (Cooley [1902] 2012:167). Our 'sympathetic introspection' leaves us vulnerable to envy; we desire membership to a powerful group because it gives us insight to a 'similar life' that we see through our socialization. We desire these connections to continue to develop our 'selves'. Cooley ([1902] 2012) says that society is inherently "a social organism" with which a "living whole" survives by the phases of consciousness of individuals and a collective (168).

The three components of consciousness according to Cooley ([1902] 2012) are the self, which “thinks of the self,” the social consciousness which “in an individual aspect is what we think of others,” and the public consciousness which “is the collective view” of the whole (168). The inability of the self to separate from the social, and the social from the public, gives us a unique lens with which to interpret and understand the public consciousness that becomes an identifying feature of the cult itself as well as the public’s reaction to the cult. It is these influences that take root as particular attitudes that become so pervasive into this public, social, and self-consciousness.

The second classical theorist on the ‘self’ is George Herbert Mead. Mead must be the second theorist whose work we examine in this chapter, because his work includes a foundational element of symbolic interactionism, the sociological theory lens used in this thesis, which will be further examined by Blumer. He is able to successfully articulate the social relationship that makes up the self—the ‘I’ versus the ‘me’, which will continue to come into play in later chapters.

Mead suggests that “the self develops into an individual as a result of...others” ([1934] 2012:347). Mead argues that the self is “distinguished between the self and body” because even if we lose parts of the body, this isn’t necessarily true for the self ([1934] 2012:348). Mead further articulates this concept by expressing that we are made up of different personalities connected in one—we act differently depending on our relationships to others. We mean “one thing to one man and another thing to another” (Mead [1934] 2012:351). Mead helps us understand that we “organize our ‘self’ with reference to our community” in which we are a part ([1934] 2012:352).

We often think of the ‘self’ with reference to the group because we identify ourselves primarily as fitting within said group. Our thoughts, feelings, and even our morals, are linked from the ‘me’ to the ‘I’, because these attitudes often dictate the way in which we think, feel, and behave, since we see ourselves both as subjects and objects. Mead’s most defining point, however, is that we tend to “respond to the attitudes of others” in terms of ‘I’, with reference to ourselves, and adopt the “attitudes of others [for ourselves]” ([1934] 2012:358). This suggests that there is a difference between the me and the I; the me is a social identity, occupying the learned social behaviors and norms and adopting these into the identity, while the I is much more impulsive, not necessarily acting with regard to the social environment (Mead [1934] 2012:358). This relates to Mead’s “generalized other,” or perception of others’ responses towards ourselves shaping how we will react and behave in a social setting ([1934] 2012:358). This perception no doubt plays a role in an individual’s membership to a powerful group, just as it does in everyday life. This suggests that individuals re-envision the world they live in with the social context in mind; we further develop who we are through social interactions—because interpreting others allows us to do so to ourselves (Mead [1934] 2012:348).

Mead is uniquely apt to understanding New Religious Movement and Greek Life participation because, upon joining and learning the ropes of said group, we begin to see ourselves as a member of the group and not purely as an individual. We seek approval, community, connection, mutual understanding, and the like—which we can find, should we so choose, in structured organizations like cults and Greek life. We conceptualize how we want to interact with society by understanding the nature of ‘I’ versus ‘me’. Once we do, we are able to adopt the ‘attitudes’ of others as our own—into the me. While we are still acting independently and impulsively as an ‘I’, the ‘me’ is the version of ourselves that adopts the new social

atmosphere we have joined. The ‘me’ is the self we think of in terms of our surroundings. The ability of the ‘self’ to be flexible, both in expression and in perception, allows the ‘self’ to evolve and become united within a bigger group. This is pertinent to New Religious Movements and Greek Life in particular because both organizations have a particular ‘attitude’ or set of values and practices that are unique to the group and its members. These attitudes are so unwaveringly strong that the individual’s identity becomes embedded within the attitudes of the collective.

Blumer is the third and final classical theorist necessary to the integrity of this preliminary chapter about the self. Blumer helps to clearly delineate the theory of symbolic interactionism even further; he lays the foundation for future theorists in other chapters to help guide our understanding of more contemporary sociological theory, found in chapter 2, as well as dramaturgical theory found in chapter 3.

Blumer, a disciple of Mead, builds onto him quite closely, while trying to formalize Mead’s lessons. Blumer ([1969] 2012) tells us that individuals are active components of the social atmosphere, not passive ones. We have autonomy in the decisions we make as ‘selves’ — humans are not solely existing at the whims of institutions. Blumer would suggest that it is individuals who choose to partake in the system, whatever the system may be. This includes sub-systems (with unique sub-cultures) which have their own ‘total institution’ feel, much like Greek Life or New Religious Movements. It is not just structural societal influences that have pushed a passive ‘self’ to pursue this type of organization. This is primarily because “human beings can be the object of their own actions” which helps identify what it means to have a conscious ‘self’ (Blumer [1969] 2012:251). He points this out via a critique of “most sociologists” of his era (notably, those in the Structural Functionalist tradition) who refer to society without referring to the individual and his/her/their actions in the context, but by referencing “acts which have been

done to them” in the context of an organization or institution of which they have no perceived influence or control (Blumer [1969] 2012:253). We form our own actions based on “interpreting situations and developing symbols” which we can use in future interactions based on what we learned from previous situations (Blumer [1969] 2012:254). Members of New Religious Movements are a great example of this theory in action because they help show how individuals come to develop new symbols from their time in these totalizing institutions, a concept which will be further developed in later chapters. It is the hallmark of these institutions that they create symbols with which the individuals can interpret the world, which by definition is the meaning of symbolic interactionism. Even more importantly, this interpretation of the world is unique to the framing of the NRM or Greek organization, framing the way in which individuals will choose to interact and inherently empowering the strength of the organization further. Blumer argues that we have the power to define our actions based on these interpretations of our social environments and that we are not merely existing while we wait for structural or systematic changes to be instituted that will affect our actions and re-actions.

By tracing the classical theory on the self, starting with Cooley, then Mead, and finally Blumer, this chapter provides a fundamental understanding of the self from the sociological perspective—to determine that there is a difference between symbolic interactionism and the common psychological perception of the ‘self’ that is spoken about in common conversation. Moreover, this chapter has attempted to show the evolution of preliminary sociological theory of the self via the most important elements of these theories, beginning with an explanation of different forms of consciousness from Cooley, continuing with an examination of individuals’ use of the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ to navigate social life (Mead), and finally ending with Blumer’s active (as opposed to passive) nature of individuals in navigating social spaces. These early theories

provide insight on the chosen cases of interest, cults or NRMs and Greek Life, to explain how sociologists understand the self in relation to these powerful groups and build a foundation for the use of more contemporary work on the self that will be explored in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

This contemporary theory on the self, as opposed to the classical theory on the ‘self’ first introduced in Chapter 1, is vastly more complicated, because it introduces new ways to think about this same ‘self’; the theorists in this chapter argue that there is a complex interworking of social institutions and individuals that impacts the construction and management of self—which includes an infusion with different social roles that complicate the question of having and identifying one’s ‘core self’. This chapter will build upon and acknowledge that the basis of this understanding is grounded in microsociology by asking the following questions: What is a ‘core self’ and how does the contemporary understanding of ‘self’ help navigate a discussion about the ‘core self’? Who or what, in our modern theory ignites, motivates, and emphasizes the understanding of a core self? Furthermore, what kind of ‘selves’ are there? Who or what is involved in this contemporary construction of ‘self’? And finally, how can we use these complicated theories to make sense of membership in powerful groups?

Selfhood, according to McCall and Simmons, is when an individual “begins to act toward himself similarly to how he acts toward other people” (1978:52). A role relates to a “line of action” of a character, while a character relates to “a person with distinctive personal characteristics” (McCall and Simmons 1978:56). We must utilize role to get to character—“we must choose a role and perform it in an expressive manner of that role if we are to become persons and have character” (McCall and Simmons 1978:57). A person’s identity comes from both—these identities “serve as the rungs on which social identities and personal biographies can be hung” (McCall and Simmons 1978:62). An individual needs a personal identity in order to be

recognized, and once recognized by others, establish stable social relationships (McCall and Simmons 1978:63).

In effect, this way of identifying people enables us to “categorize each other according to our social positions,” of which these expectations then constitute social roles (McCall and Simmons 1978:64). Social roles of some kind are expected. While it is unexpected that we join a cult per se, it has become commonplace for college students to take part in Fraternity or Sorority Life. Moreover, there has even become an affiliated status with this group, suggesting that it has become such a sought after social role. Being initiated as a member of a sorority or fraternity often equates to a prestigious personal identity and immediate social bonds that come from being someone’s ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. Furthermore, we categorize one another dependent upon the social roles individuals occupy: If you are a member of a cult or a NRM, even though you are often hidden from the rest of the society, you are still categorized as a member by outsiders, insiders, and yourself.

In order to address the above questions, it is necessary to envision what it means to have ‘selfhood’—or a concentration of different roles that form, in our individual personal perspectives, the most important inner essence of one’s self—and how this ‘selfhood’ allows us to adopt different social roles—or the building blocks of our identities as they pertain to our social lives. Social roles, for example, can be our defining familial roles, or related to our positions in the workplace; they’re important because they signify our values to others based on the social conception of that role. The way we are perceived by others (and the lives we lead as a result) is directly influenced by the way we see ourselves—making the contemporary self a priority in everyday life.

Furthermore, our study of the self is not so simple as to merely acknowledge that our social roles are inherently connected to our identity (in other words, our sense of self), but we must also recognize that there are multiple social roles that we have access to and must choose from daily—i.e. there is an important distinction between roles that form a hierarchy of role identities. This hierarchy of roles, all occupied by the same person, is reminiscent of Mead because he is the first to suggest that we do highlight different personalities in different social circumstances. The hierarchy of role identities, each of which has influence on the other, depends on prominence and a cost/benefit analysis of what the individual can gain depending on what identity they are utilizing, which is called the “perceived opportunity structure” (McCall and Simmons 1978:73). It may make sense for an individual to join Greek Life on a college campus because of the perceived benefits, friends, invitations to parties, access to other groups who are similarly involved, status and prestige affiliated with the organization, access to student leadership, etc. However, in order to confirm one’s sense of self, individuals need role support that they can only find from other people (McCall and Simmons 1978:71). Role support is a “precious commodity” because it must be maintained, which we accomplish through forming interpersonal relationships which become increasingly valuable and harder to break as we get closer to one another in our relationships (McCall and Simmons 1978:168). Role support is especially crucial in powerful groups like cults or Greek organizations because the group dynamic reinforces an in-group, out-group mentality; there are elements of secrecy to ritual, meetings, and knowledge within the group that is not meant to be public to others outside of this inner circle.

When we find these intrinsic problems with our identities that are not being supported by others, we begin to “change the content of our role identities and rearrange our hierarchy”

(McCall and Simmons 1978:196). But when we do this, we change our versions and conceptions of our selves too (McCall and Simmons 1978:220). This, in part, comes from our external social expectations which reinforce the need to achieve these ideal role identities; what's even more important, though, is that our "self-expectations form the link between individuals and our social environment" (McCall and Simmons 1978:90). Self-expectations and social expectations can often be the fuel, or motivation, with which we attempt to join such powerful groups. Without these, we would be much less likely to find these totalizing institutions so appealing. We would not be asking ourselves what this group can do for our identities, because, without social pressure, this wouldn't be important.

Additionally, theorists Gecas and Burke introduce the 'self-concept' theory, which helps compliment the theory of social roles and role identity hierarchy envisioned by McCall and Simmons. Self-concept is the notion that individuals have a "sum total of the individual's thoughts and feelings about him/herself," which can come from the formation of a role identity hierarchy (Gecas and Burke 1995:42). This is important because it dictates a theory that gives credence to a 'core self', or a compilation of all of these identities to form what we, ourselves as individuals, recognize to be the most important element of our 'selves'. When studied in addition to McCall and Simmons' theory of role identity hierarchy, these theories suggest that individuals have the capacity to develop an understanding of him/her/themselves holistically, not merely relying on the separation of each social role or on the most important social role (whichever is currently at the top of the hierarchy) to mimic the conception of the self.

Gecas and Burke draw on Mead as they suggest that "identities are social fictions created out of this symbolic milieu, but they are highly valued fictions having real consequences for the interactants and the course of the interaction. Money, power, love, esteem, or other resources

may be at stake” (1995:43). Gecas and Burke are founded in Mead’s theory of social organization, meaning that the self is referenced with the external community in mind. These motivating factors are often what encourage individuals to seek changes to their self-concept, resulting in joining powerful groups that they can use to effectively embody new identities. This is an extraordinary example of the unique components that help to create contemporary theory on the self—because what this theory highlights is that the self has very real social, economic, and even political implications which can affect the future reality of the person who personifies that self.

Additionally, Gecas and Burke introduce the study of self-efficacy because “one needs to ask when one's self-appraisals depend on others' appraisals” and how these appraisals affect the understanding of the self (1995:51). The most relevant instances of such include “when one's motive in self-presentation is to impress others, either as a means of gaining resources or to raise one's self-esteem” especially in a group setting (Gecas and Burke 1995:51). Impressing others for self-esteem can be as simple as flaunting membership to a sorority or fraternity by wearing the Greek letters affiliated with them around the campus, or by involving oneself in the leadership of an NRM to gain the approval of other members or other influencing leaders. Other people have such a strong effect on one’s self-concept because one depends on their approval.

It is important to acknowledge “the active, selective, and protective nature of the self in its relationship to various social environments” (Gecas and Burke 1995:53). This is unique to powerful groups because the members form a relationship that resembles a familial connection, like that of a religious group or ‘sisterhood’ or ‘brotherhood’ in Greek Life. Gecas and Burke suggest that “self-esteem is most affected by interpersonal relations with family, friends, and one’s local community” (Gecas and Burke 1995:53), meaning that who we surround ourselves

with really does matter. Gecas and Burke link sociological theory with psychological theory, allowing us to identify how and when self-esteem can interact with one's social environment to impact one's self-conception in our modern world. Much of the understanding of identity and self-esteem or respect, especially for individuals who are the least fortunate among a society, originates "a sense of self-worth or personal significance and that its accessibility depends in part on the roles available to us" like what is suggested by both Goffman and McCall and Simmons (Snow and Anderson 1987:1339).

Snow and Anderson are instrumental in highlighting the importance of identity talk in the development of an individual's identity or sense of self. Identity work, according to Snow and Anderson, is "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" as it was introduced by Gecas and Burke (1987:1348). They use data from interviews with homeless persons to explore the ways that identity talk can be used to mitigate stigma. In their study, homeless individuals use 'identity talk' in a manner of forms, including, "distancing, and embracement" (Snow and Anderson 1987:1348). Examples of identity talk in action include embracing the role an individual occupies (in this study it was homelessness) or distancing oneself from the negatives of said role to avoid identifying within it. Furthermore, fictive story-telling is utilized by both NRMs and Greek Life. NRMs often intrigue potential members by piecing together information to create a new version of an old truth: Jehovah's Witnesses follow a 'new' version of the *Bible*, *The New Translation*, one that has been re-written to exclude or include certain stories to re-tell a version of Christianity that benefits their group (Knox 2011:164). Identity talk, according to Snow and Anderson in their study of homeless persons, can incorporate role-distancing, a strategy first identified by McCall and Simmons. In the homeless persons study, they find that

“[the homeless] sounded at times much like middle-class citizens berating welfare recipients role distancing involves an active and self-conscious attempt to foster the impression of a lack of commitment or attachment to a particular role in order to deny the virtual self-implied” (Snow and Anderson 1987:1350). The participants distanced themselves from characteristics of homeless persons that they didn’t identify with themselves or thought was beneath them, signaling a need to maintain their perceived self-worth. Distancing, and other strategies, are used when one “finds himself cast into or enacting a role in which the social identity implied is inconsistent with the desired or actual self-conception” (Snow and Anderson 1987:1350). This also applies when an actual identity is inconsistent with an individual’s ideal version of the same identity (thereby existing an inconsistency in role identities within the hierarchy), because “the social identities lodged in [roles available to them in the workplace] are frequently inconsistent with the desired or idealized self-conceptions of some of the homeless” resulting in their dissociation from work they don’t see as being equitable to their idealized selves, which will be examined in more detail later on in this chapter (Snow and Anderson 1987:1351).

NRMs and Greek Life members utilize both strategies when attempting to go through sorority or fraternity recruitment for example. Individuals will distance themselves from certain stereotypical features of organizations they do not wish to join, in hopes of seeming more appealing to others. Additionally, certain fraternities and sororities have been known to selectively engage in socials solely with those of their ‘same social strata’. Embracing one’s role in an NRM, for instance, is one way to confirm an individual’s identity in this group. It is a manner of convincing oneself that they ‘belong’, as well as countering negative perceptions of these groups from others. Some members, when considering leaving the group they have known to be their chosen family, will actively attempt to engage and involve themselves further in the

group as an attempt to save their identities as cult members. The “direct rewards of membership, like friendship, belonging, higher self-esteem, religious experience, personal identity” encourage members to fight for their membership because it reflects upon their self-hood (Coates 2012a:179).

Additionally, we must take a closer look at the different types of selves that are introduced by these theorists, beginning with the ‘gloried self’. The ‘gloried self’, or the media self, introduced by Adler and Adler, arises when individuals become the focus of intense interpersonal and media attention, leading to their achieving celebrity status” and changing their conceptions of self to meet the demands and expectations of the version of themselves portrayed in the media (1989:299). A "public persona" is created, usually by the media, which differs from individuals' private personas”, much like Goffman’s theory of performance, or the attempt to put on different facades for others (Adler and Adler 1989:299). This happens because heightened media portrayals often “causes individuals to objectify their selves to themselves” (Adler and Adler 1989:299). Eventually, individuals become “alienated from themselves through the separation of their self-concept from the conception of their selves held by others” (Adler and Adler 1989:299). The best example of a ‘gloried self’ that is easily recognizable in popular culture about cults (NRMs) or Greek life, is David Koresh, the founder and leader of the Branch Davidians. Koresh was popularized in the media during the 51-day siege of the compound by federal agents; he was glamorized and vilified, to the point in which there was a distinct change in his behaviors and approach to the tragedy (Dowdle and Dowdle 2018). He became the image that was portrayed in the media, leaving key elements of his former self behind and ultimately, leading to the downfall of the movement and its people. The separation of self-concept is reminiscent of Gecas and Burke, as it further supports the necessity of the self-concept theory.

Franks and Marolla insist on the importance of self-esteem in maintaining social connectedness as well as individuality in identity (1976:325). Franks and Marolla articulate identity theory from the point of view of both inner and outer self-esteem—which is conceptualized as the process of “the reflected appraisals of significant others in one's social environment in the form of social approval and the individual's feelings of efficacy and competence derived from his own perceptions of the effects he has on his environment” (1976:325). Inner self-esteem is derived from “the experience of self as an active agent of making things actually happen and realizing one's intents in an impartial world,” while outer self-esteem is described as being “bestowed by others” and not by the self (Franks and Marolla 1976:326). Franks and Marolla’s outer self-esteem concept relates easily back to social expectations and motives; embracing a group for its benefits to one’s identity comes from positive outer self-esteem based on the membership in said group.

Franks and Marolla suggest that one’s “actions and consequences are materials out of which knowledge is built” rather than a passive mirroring of fixed stimuli (1976:329). Both allow focus on what “symbolically equipped persons teach themselves in addition to that which is learned by the passive incorporation of purely verbal symbols initiated from situated others” (Franks and Marolla 1976:329). Symbols can and are often introduced in these powerful groups to facilitate a stronger inner and outer self-esteem as it relates to that particular group. For instance, the rituals involved in Greek Life and NRMs create shared meaning that is unique to their particular group. Sorority and fraternity initiation involves members learning shared secrets, wearing or not wearing letters, wearing particular colors or robes, and reciting verbal symbols. This relates to their understanding and incorporation of Mead’s ‘generalized other’, because they

utilize this component to create their dualized version of self-esteem, coming from both the inner self and the perceived outer self, which is further commented on by Stryker and Burke.

The introduction of an inner and outer self suggests that there is a transition in theory from primarily internal phenomenon in social interactions to the presence of more perceived structural boundaries. These structural boundaries begin to have a greater influence on the conception of the self. Particularly because of the “consequences of identity ties... and resulting identity salience” and significance to individuals (Stryker and Burke 2000:287). Stryker and Burke establish the importance of behavior and character in identity maintenance by questioning how self-meanings relate to the meanings of one’s behavior in the context of one’s social interactions (Stryker and Burke 2000:287). Burke and Stryker rely on the concept of an ‘identity standard’, the perceptions of an individual’s meanings for symbolism in interactions, the individual’s behavior, and the comparator between the standard and his/her/their perceptions to establish the subjectivity of one’s identity through self-verification (2000:288). This article includes the functionality of social structural sources (or behavior) and internal cognitive processes (or internalized perceptions) to understand the salience of identities in a world of complex social interconnectedness—as there are multiple identities and roles that are shared by the same person (Stryker and Burke 2000:289). When these identities are put to the test in the practicality of the real world, the individual must rely on these interactions to either confirm or deny the successfulness of his/her/their perception of their role(s) as it compares to the standard (which is established and maintained by society) for that role, which in turn reflects the salience of the particular identity in question (Stryker and Burke 2000:290). For instance, because one’s identity as a ‘sister’ or a ‘brother’ in their respective Greek organization is easily comparable, since there are many other members, this identity is often being compared and contrasted with

other members. If an individual, comparatively, is not living up to the duties and responsibilities of brotherhood or sisterhood, said individual is likely to reconsider the salience of that identity, meaning it will be less influential to the 'core self' than another, more beneficial identity. Moreover, the individual will be likely to consider, if not actually, leave said group. Stryker and Burke's work implies the "social structure's dependence on the functionality of identities" (2000:291). This further reiterates to society that we need to build, maintain, and utilize multiple identities to establish our person-hood.

Gubrium and Holstein suggest that there has been a historical shift in complexity of institutions, or external context for the self, resulting in a shift in selfhood. Because of our high involvement in the modern world, Gubrium and Holstein suggest that "No single discursive environment determines who and what we are. In today's world, the individual has diverse options for self-construction. To some degree, one can choose the environment(s) in which one's self will be constituted," or we have the option to join a group just as we have the same option to deny ourselves membership to a powerful group (Gubrium and Holstein 2000:106). However, the issue lies in a lack of equity between opportunities of individuals, such that "not everyone is subjected to or has access to the same field of possibilities" (Gubrium and Holstein 2000:108). For those with more privileges, "self-building opportunities may appear to be a smorgasbord of identities, while the less advantaged are more likely to be selectively filtered through the self-constructive processing of going concerns of last resort such as homeless shelters and prisons" (Gubrium and Holstein 2000:108).

While Gubrium and Holstein recognize economic gaps in opportunity, this could also be applied to an all-encompassing membership, or a membership to a group that excludes an individual from access to joining another. For instance, individuals in cults can be restricted from

membership to other religious organizations, or to any organizations that oppose the values of the institution. Although sororities and fraternities are not institutions that control their members completely, their members are undoubtedly coming from a select pool of potential new members: there are economic dispositions that must be met in order for students to attend university in the first place, as well as the added financial responsibility of members to pay for their dues. What these authors want to pinpoint, however, is that “we need to consider the myriad overlapping, intersecting going concerns that shape the self” (Gubrium and Holstein 2000:111). Because of our ties to all of these ‘discursive environments’, “self-construction is now beyond personal control” (Gubrium and Holstein 2000:111). They want to remind us that “the social is also built out of the eminently variegated going concerns that supply us with identities” (Gubrium and Holstein 2000:112).

Contemporary theory of the self is new and innovative, compared to the foundational understanding of the self that was first introduced by Cooley, Mead, and Blumer in Chapter 1. Yet, this contemporary theory retains a particular attachment to symbolism and the creation of shared meaning; this is how we communicate in our shared social world. Most importantly, this chapter contributes a condensed version of several influential contemporary sociological theories of the self, including that of the role hierarchy model, self-concept, identity-talk, inner and outer self-esteem, identity-salience, and going concerns models of self-construction and identity navigation. These theories, all together, serve as a guide with which we can compare and contrast the foundation of the sociological self with how we conceptualize a self in modern day, especially as a part of a NRM or member of Greek Life on a college campus. This chapter suggests that certain theories animate a core self and that this core self is augmented by different types of selves, the idealized self, the fallible self, and the gloried self, all of which can be made

examples of in Cult culture and FSL (Fraternity and Sorority Life). This chapter begins with an explanation of 'selfhood' and how that contributes to an individual's ability to navigate both his/her/their personal expectations as well as societal expectations for group membership.

Throughout this chapter, the reader will find direct connections from theories to applied material as well as what strategies inherent in these theories can be utilized to construct dimensions of a self as well as, arguably, the core self.

CHAPTER THREE

This chapter will explore the perception of the self as a social performance and provide a new lens with which we can view conceptions of the self. Goffman is leading figure in the sociology of the self at the symbolic interaction level, as he conceptualizes an individual in a group setting through what we think of dramaturgy and performance. Goffman's theory of performance, put forth in the book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), gives further insight on individual level interaction and connects to greater themes such as social roles, identity work, and the ability for powerful groups to emphasize and institutionalize social norms within their organizations. The theories inside this chapter can provide a more complete picture of an individual paying very close attention to how he is perceived, as well as the constraints that come with membership in a powerful group.

The basis of this theory, Goffman suggests, is that each individual participant acts as a performer, in order to manipulate a situation (social interaction) so that it fits into an acceptable form of the "working consensus," or agreed upon negotiation between individuals (1959:10). He describes the many tools at the disposal of the performer to create his/her performance which he/she pushes outward onto the rest of society in any given context. The performer will utilize setting, a part of his/her chosen front, "or expressive equipment intentionally or unintentionally utilized by an individual in a performance" (Goffman 1959:22). The setting of the interactions of a group as a private and membership oriented such as a cult is necessary because it reflects the intentions of said group. The concept of using setting for performance is best exemplified in models of New Religious Movements, because these groups tend to create, facilitate, and spread their message when in seclusion and inside the physical, collective space of a commune. The

‘social front,’ or environment, is “abstract and general,” but over time will “become institutionalized in terms of a stereotypical expectation” for said role or performance—which allows for the normalization of practices within said group (Goffman 1959:26). A ‘social front’ is based on the common agreement to uphold the performance—like ritual attire (including robes and pins for sororities and fraternities) as well as certain prescribed dialogue that is reserved for members and differentiates between those included and excluded from the organization; in a New Religious Movement, or Greek Life, these fronts act as the gateway to a unique social agenda and set of norms that individual members must master in order to be assimilated into their new society.

The symbolic interactionist perspective of social interaction as performance enables sociologists to better comprehend the negotiation between the self and broader society. Performers utilize “secret consumption,” or engaging in private acts apart from the group that do not measure up to the image the individual means to portray, in order to deceive or conceal information, effort, or other ideals from his/her audience (Goffman 1959:42). The prototype for deceit in a social context is none other than NRM leaders; they’re known for their charisma and ability to pull people into their inner circle but are also known for personal acts of scandal that often come to light later (Crockford 2018:95). Thus, it is inevitable that members encounter inconsistencies with the front that is presented, leading to a more complicated dramaturgical experience for both leaders and members. Moreover, performers also fall victim to “proposing a closer relationship to our audience” than already exists, by which they will fraternize with the audience suggesting an inauthentic relationship (Goffman 1959:48). This is seen predominantly in social groups with perceived closeness but internal conflicts, e.g. Greek Life. Fraternities and sororities are known for their clique-y tendencies; performers within the organization will likely

claim to be closer to all of their brothers or sisters, when in reality, the gossip can be insurmountable. There is a difference between sincere and inauthentic, or cynical, performances, leading us as observers to question when the individual is a true believer in his/her/their performance and when they are aware of their own front (Goffman 1959:16). When a performance is authentic, the individual's conception of him or herself matches the particular performance; however, when it is inauthentic or cynical, the individual sees this particular interaction as a performance—meaning they are fully aware of the setting, manner, and predisposition of their person. Furthermore, we, as performers, suffer from “incompatible impressions” which subject our version of reality to skepticism from our audience, risking the perceived success of our performance (Goffman 1959:51). We also invoke audience separation to leave our audience in awe, or in some cases shame, of our performance (Goffman 1959:70). When NRM leaders falter, especially in the limited relevance of their teachings, they risk the validity of their entire organization to members of the group; these members are then given an opportunity to poke holes in the overall logic and agenda. Which is why it is even more important that the charismatic leader separate from his audience to leave them in awe of his ideology, practice, and presence. Furthermore, this separation isn't necessarily always a literal separation, but rather making sure the audience is homogenous—or doesn't include different people who all have different perceptions of the leader in one group (Goffman 1959:49).

These performances are vital to understand because “everyone plays a role...which we use to understand one another and ourselves,” as we play a role both for others and for ourselves (Goffman 1959:19). In an NRM, the leader can be privy to his performance as a messiah because all of the roles of the group are engaged in active performance-management. Regardless of the group or organization, individuals are necessary to make up the whole—each playing a pivotal

part in the success or failure of the group's performance altogether. The essence of a performance is that we use them to "show an idealized view of situations and better versions of ourselves" (Goffman 1959:35). It is often reported by former members that, at least in part, their motivations for joining said group were directly linked to the way others perceived them upon joining; they cited an opportunity to 'better themselves' thanks to the moral pursuits of the NRM.

Another important inclusion within performance is referencing 'identity talk' and 'institution talk' as discussed earlier in Chapter 2, because "talk and interaction remain the operating vehicles through which individuals construct selves" especially as these elements relate to morals (Gubrium and Holstein 2000:109). But, where Gubrium and Holstein slightly differ from Goffman is in their critique that "Neither are 'selves' unfettered performances or situationally convenient presentations" (Gubrium and Holstein 2000:109). Instead, they suggest that these selves are also "artifacts of discourses-in-practice, reflecting the moral agendas and material constraints of the diverse going concerns and discursive environments of postmodern life" (Gubrium and Holstein 2000:109). These 'going concerns' reflect the intricacy of our social environment, not only complicating performance, but engaging individuals in a complex role management between their performances and these greater institutions.

These greater institutions include what Goffman calls 'Total Institutions' in his work, *Asylum*, and what Scott refers to in modern life as 'Reinventive Institutions'. Based on Goffman's model, but reintroduced in Scott's work, Total Institutions are "a place of residence and work where a large number of situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable length of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life" (Scott 2010:214). What comes to mind first upon imagining this total institution, is a cult; most likely, the cult community lives wholly and completely in a commune-like setting, closed off from the

rest of society. The key elements of such included, “(a) the unfolding of the daily round in the same place and under the same authority; (b) batch living or being treated as part of an anonymous mass; (c) the rigid timetabling and scheduling of activities; and (d) an institutional goal of resocialization,” which contributes to the cult-like image (Scott 2010:215). Most importantly, however, these total institutions “revealed how organizational structures shape the behavior of individuals through the authoritative imposition of consequential identities” (Scott 2010:215). In a cult, or NRM, the identities that are imposed upon members are hierarchical, resulting in a top-down division of power. The hierarchy model ensures that, while it may appear that everyone is living and working in harmony, everyone has a place and must know their place well enough to avoid dysfunction within the community. This resolves that individuals and institutions form “agentic team performance,” a direct connection to Goffman which will be discussed later on in this chapter, that is involved in identity performance and development (Scott 2010:215). The team network suggests that it is not just one individual whose successful adaptation of his/her role is necessary, but that in order for the organization to maintain stability, it becomes a multi-person performance.

Scott introduces reinventive institutions (RIs), or “places to which people retreat for periods of intense self-reflection, education, enrichment and reform, but under their own volition, in pursuit of ‘self-improvement’” that are focused on reinventing a new, more improved, self (Scott 2010:218). They have often been called “greedy institutions” for the claim they have on “the totality of their members’ social identities by pervading every role they play and every aspect of their lifestyle,” much like cults do in private spaces known in popular culture as the commune (Scott 2010:218). However, RIs are unique from total institutions because, in contemporary society, they are often sought out by the individual in hopes of attaining a new

version of him, her, or themselves. RIs apply more broadly to this thesis because they can address Greek Life, as well. Greek Life does not function with the same commune-style set up as NRMs, but instead encourages a mold to be filled with the false pretense of absolute individuality. It is of practice within religious cults to form “a symbolic boundary between insiders and outsiders that is equally powerful: these are disciplinary mechanisms, not blockades or ‘institutions without walls’, which members are ostensibly free to leave but choose not to” (Scott 2010:219). Again, there is a pretense of freedom and individuality within the RI. They become similarly problematic, however, because there are underlying mechanisms within the organizations which can serve as incentives or punishments that prevent an individual from freely leaving the environment or organization.

What is most identifiable about reinventive institutions, according to the author, is their relationship to the “culture of dissatisfaction with the fallible self” (Scott 2010:219). RIs serve as a bridge between total institutions and performance because they introduce the concept of purposeful self-construction, as opposed to the use of force or undeniable deceit and coercion. Instead of nixing the old self, they become a viable, even intuitive option, because “[t]hey offer to process, reshape and reform by trimming away negative emotional experiences, so that what emerges is a set of ‘gingerbread people’” (Scott 2010:219). The emotional component, although important to personal motivations, membership management, and dramaturgical performance, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. The author plays with the idea of “life politics (Giddens, 1991) writ large: an anxious preoccupation with the self as a reflexive project, and a quest for authentic living that necessitates our trust in abstract systems of expertise” which can only be achieved when an individual seeks out RIs (Scott 2010:220). The idea that individuals join Greek Life or NRMs because they are seeking more authentic versions of themselves, suggests that

they are purposefully attempting to make an active change in their performance of self. The contemporary notion that one's self is not good enough to be left alone, but moreover, must be actively changed by joining such a powerful group, suggests that the making of a self is a very social experience, not innate or natural.

Foucault's approach, according to Scott's analysis, suggests that "power is most effective when it operates not through coercive domination but by securing the willing compliance of subjects to be governed" (Scott 2010:221). These subjects willingly submit themselves to the rules and regulations of the powerful group upon initiation to said group, because they believe it to be most beneficial to their pursuit of an authentic self, suggesting that they don't believe their own performances support the best version of themselves; better yet, they need these institutions to help guide them to an acceptable societal version of selfhood. Scott continues by stating that "Performative regulation occurs where groups of people submit themselves to the authority of an institution, internalize its values and enact them through mutual surveillance in an inmate culture"—which is a combination of thought from both Goffman and Foucault, since power is both "horizontal and vertical" in our "Panopticonic culture of surveillance" (Scott 2010:221). If individuals are joining these groups and adopting its values willingly, they are more likely to reinforce the rules, regulations, and values upon one another simply by adopting them themselves—allowing the appearance of a free-willed institution. It is the ability of these institutions to prioritize group involvement and engagement, either by group therapy, collective prayer, and group meetings, or the like, that forms "a valuation of group process, interaction and ritual echoes the performative regulation" (Scott 2010:223). The validation of these exercises further contributes to the individuals' belief that doing so will lead to a better version of themselves. The uniqueness of RIs is their nuanced restrictiveness, or the lack of "performative

autonomy [from members] compromised by the discipline of interaction order” (Scott 2010:227). RIs, including both NRMs and Greek Life organizations, are manipulative because they reduce individuals to a lack of autonomy in their performance as opposed to autonomy in everyday activities alone, like total institutions would.

Goffman, in his work on performances, suggests that performances affect reality because we use them to legitimize, and eventually institutionalize, aspects of our society, such as social strata and status. This provides a gateway with which gender roles and socioeconomic differences can become normalized: The manipulation of roles within hierarchical organizations such as NRMs can attest to the validity of a strong male role model, who in a religious sect is often the self-proclaimed Prophet speaking the word of God, which can lead to the opportunity for polygamy, child abuse, physical, emotional, and psychologically controlling behaviors (Crockford 2018:95). The implications of such a position are indicative of broader traditional gender roles and the distribution of power based on gender, class, race/ethnicity, and other characteristics.

Goffman argues that neither extreme truth nor complete falsehood in performance is desirable—which relays well into Scott’s message, that RIs are a powerful institutional force that can afflict and complicate the conception of ‘selves’ further. Both suggest this is because we, as an audience, often seek to determine the sincerity of a performance—attempting to identify them as either “contrived or real” (Scott 2010:75). Our navigation of these social performances is what can encourage us to decide to join or leave a group in the first place. This is conducive to understanding how and why individuals will negotiate his/her/their identities to fit inside such a punitive box, like a cult for instance. The idea of working as a collective to uphold a

performance, especially in the form of maintaining a common message and purpose as an organization, epitomizes what Goffman suggests is a social performance.

The second part of Goffman's book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), is meant to break from the boundaries of merely individual level social interaction to something much more intricate—teamwork in performance, or as Scott referred to it, “agentic team performance” (Scott 2010:215). According to Goffman, a teammate is “someone whose dramaturgical cooperation one is dependent upon in fostering a given definition of a situation” (1959:80). Team management and establishment of a performance involves and engages multiple players with whom are responsible for maintaining different roles and employing different techniques depending on the outcomes of the said situation. The importance of the team is in establishing an “impression of confidence” meant to convince the audience of the validity and authenticity of the performance (Goffman 1959:90). In some cases, the roles will be allocated by the director of the performance, who “goes between them and the audience” (Goffman 1959:99). This suggests that we incorporate power in subtle ways: the group leader is the one setting the stage and defining the scope of all group interactions—but the director is and does not have to be the only ‘director’. Symbolic interaction within this group suggests that more power belongs to who is directing what’s going on and the dictation of other people needing to please and acquiesce to one another, the audience, or the leader; for example, this relates to NRM members or Greek life members choosing to leave or being kicked out of their organizations because they were removed from their leadership roles, leaving a feeling of emptiness and disconnectedness. The best example of a director in NRMs is charismatic leaders—these individuals are responsible for managing both the performance and the audience’s reception of said performance. A perceived Prophet cannot make his performance palpable without the

participation of other key members and the encouragement from the audience, which is initiated by the closeness of the Prophet in his personal relationships with the audience. In order to do so, the team must be aware of the fields with which a performance is occupied by, the front region, which occupies “accentuated facts and appearance” (Goffman 1959:111). They must also note the backstage, in which performers can “drop the front” they are attempting to put on (Goffman 1959:112); finally, the team must be aware of the outside, which is “neither front nor back...[where] a different show is being put on” (Goffman 1959:135). These areas require the involvement of a team, whether it is necessarily the original team who is actively performing the performance, or an alternative team that is either opposed or subsequently engaged, to invoke techniques for “impression management” (Goffman 1959:113).

Some of the challenges facing a team when attempting to define a situation a particular way includes the multitude of characters who have the capacity to harm or benefit the team, the nuances of collusion within a team, and the “information control” that is necessary to execute a performance (Goffman 1959:141). This includes the extent to which members might be keeping group secrets from administration i.e. behaviors that are not allowed; For NRMs and Greek Life, the administration is the law or community, the group must keep knowledge inside and/or protect secrets, including hazing and the use of techniques to keep things hidden from supervision (for Greek Life, supervisors are advisors)—a big part of this could be setting i.e. off campus housing or secret get-aways from the compound. Other roles include the “traitor” or “spy” and the “renegade,” who starts to attempt to undermine the existing leadership, these are the most risky to the performance; the “shill” (a pre-planted enthusiastic joiner working from the inside) “spotters”, “mediator”, “non-person service specialist” (a person who knows what’s happening but isn’t a part of the group) the “trainer,” the “side-kick,” and the “colleague” are lower risk,

meaning that some roles help protect the team and some both the audience and the team (Goffman 1959:145). The collusion involved within a performance by members of a team, outsiders, oneself, or even with the audience is very complex—it is a unique element of performance because it has the potential for “backstage fraternization” which is initiated by individuals being allowed backstage of the performance (Goffman 1959:192). In order to prevent the embarrassment which comes from pulling the curtain on the performance, a team needs “dramaturgical loyalty, discipline, and circumspection” (Goffman 1959:214). Loyalty involves being careful with whom one shares backstage access; discipline involves maintaining one’s self-control and character maintenance despite the challenges of a performance; circumspection is the ability to prepare for a show and to know what, when, where, and how of a performance ahead of time (Goffman 1959:218).

The most important takeaway from part two of Goffman’s book is that not only can performances be analyzed “technically, politically, structurally, and culturally,” but they must also be analyzed inter-sectionally with a dramaturgical element (Goffman 1959:240). Dramaturgy for Goffman allows individuals to technically see “the standard of work,” to politically see “the capacities of one individual to direct the activity of another,” to structurally see “the image that different status groupings can maintain,” and culturally see “the maintenance of moral standards” (Goffman 1959:243). Goffman’s contribution suggests there is more to performance than meets the eye—that it is not just the individual level interaction that matters, but that context matters to the authenticity and effectiveness of performances too.

Additionally, different types of ‘selves’ have been introduced in contemporary work that help articulate Goffman’s meaning by providing examples of performance in action: The ‘idealized self’, introduced by Snow and Anderson articulates the disconnect between a homeless

person's identity and the way others see him/her/them (Snow and Anderson 1987:1351).

Goffman suggests that the essence of a performance is that we use them to “show an idealized view of situations and better versions of ourselves” (Goffman 1959:35). It is often reported by former members that, at least in part, their motivations for joining said group were directly linked to the way others perceived them upon joining; they cited an opportunity to ‘better themselves’. In seeking an opportunity to better oneself, both NRMs (New Religious Movements) and Greek Life can become options for an individual. ‘Bettering oneself’ is often cited as reasoning for college students going through sorority or fraternity recruitment; they are hoping to improve their social statuses or become better ‘more collegial’ versions of their former high-school selves. As far as New Religious Movements are concerned, the traditional commune type structure of earlier movements, like the Branch Davidians out of Waco, Texas for instance, provided a setting and system for achieving some form of religious or spiritual enlightenment, advertised as being morally superior to the previous version of any self. However, despite the best efforts of these individuals, and the best of intentions upon joining, this ‘idealized self’ can be compared to a mirage in the desert; the ‘idealized version’ of the self almost never matches up to the perception of others for the same version of that ‘self,’ rearing the ‘idealized self’ useless and imaginary.

Gubrium and Holstein identify a “culture of dissatisfaction with the fallible self” (2000:219). The ‘fallible self’ being a troubled, imperfect self (by society’s measure) that needs to be worked on in order to become an accepted social self; something that needs to be worked on is essentially a performance. The ‘fallible self’ is related to the ‘idealized self’ because both involve some need for change and/or self- improvement, leading to a new self. The key difference is that the ‘fallible self’ is imperfect first, whereas, the ‘idealized self’ is the final,

infallible version. Instead of nixing the old self, re-inventive institutions become a viable, even intuitive option, because “They offer to process, reshape and reform by trimming away negative emotional experiences, so that what emerges is a set of ‘gingerbread people’” (Gubrium and Holstein 2000:219). These ‘gingerbread people’ occupy accepted versions of the ‘self’ and have been artificially created to fix the problems that were originally detected within the ‘fallible self’. Greek Life offers the best comparison of the ‘gingerbread people’ that arise from the ‘fallible self’, because it is common on many campuses that certain fraternities and sororities have reputations for being superior or inferior to others on campus. Among these reputations are perceptions of individual members as fitting the right mold, making it easy for him/her/them to join a particular community. Logically speaking, once an entire group reduces its individuality in preference of the ‘mold’, this group has become a ‘gingerbread house’ so to speak.

Although a performance-based approach to understanding the self is deserving of its own chapter, it cannot stand alone as the sole theory about the sociological self because the performance theory’s greatest limitation is that it does not account for as much about one’s emotions or contemporary elements of the sociological examination of the self—which is why it is supplemented by other theorists within its own chapter as well as with other concrete ideas in other chapters. While Goffman gives credence to external factors in the second part of his book, it is a minor point within his book that must be developed more to help explain ongoing phenomena, especially within powerful groups. Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis does allow us to understand how there is the potential for “alienation from the self”—for instance, if one is concerned that they are making a ‘poor’ impression and not putting forward the right front in a performance (Goffman 1959:236). Goffman’s perspective of the self is that it is “a product of the scene that is created, not a cause” (1959:252). The individual self is, more precisely, a product of

“all of the arrangements” of a performance, including the performer(s), the props, the audience, and any outsiders who are also involved (Goffman 1959:253). Dramaturgy, along with other ‘arrangements’, which also include reinventive institutions and ‘going concerns’, can provide a full visual of how individuals interact within their social spheres while still considering structural and/or symbolic boundaries to these spheres. This chapter reinforces Goffman’s theory of performance while also citing the need for theories like Gubrium and Holstein’s ‘Going concerns’ as well as Scott’s ‘Reinventive Institutions’ theories to convey a membership experience as well as power dynamics within powerful groups—NRMs and Greek Life organizations.

CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter is meant to describe the influence of emotions in identity management. I will articulate why emotions are necessary to identity work and to understanding identity, describe how emotions can and do play a role in recruitment and evolution of membership in powerful groups, and describe emotion management sociologically. This chapter will primarily be based on scholarship by Lynn Smith-Lovin, as well as connections back to Stryker and Burke, to describe the influence of emotions on communicating the importance of certain roles to the self. Emotions act as a way to hone-in on the most important elements of any given interaction, and even guide future interactions. Emotions act as a medium with which individuals can incorporate greater cultural phenomenon into their daily lives and rituals. Most importantly, emotions are a tool with which we can confirm our sense of self—they give credence to the question of ‘how’ we construct the identities listed above, as well as to how we exercise these identities once we subject them to socialization.

Sociologically speaking, emotional labor is defined as “one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (Hochschild 2012:20). In terms of everyday life, we use these emotion norms, set out to enforce emotional labor, to manage our social roles and expectations. Emotion norms or “feeling rules” dictate how we are supposed to feel, how long we are supposed to feel any given emotion, the time and place for emotions, and reactions to emotions (Hochschild 2012:52). Everything from gender roles to interacting in the workforce can be related to emotion management, including negotiating identities and ‘sense of self’.

To introduce more recent theories related to emotion management and the self, Smith-Lovin as well as Stryker and Burke offer an approach that is based in earlier theories discussed in

Chapter 2, primarily that of social roles. Smith-Lovin refer to other sociologists when they suggest that there is a link between emotion management and expression and the self by means of role-taking theory, first introduced by McCall and Simmons. This is because these theories cite that an “emotional reaction depend(s) on the actors' definitions of the situation and the meanings that grow out of these definitions” (Smith-Lovin 1995:128). Role taking can be both reflexive and empathic, reflexive being focused on one’s ability “to see him or herself from the perspective of an object,” while empathic is adopting another position (Smith-Lovin 1995:128). Therefore, classical theory is still very much involved in an individual’s conception of the self in regard to his/her/their emotions because, as Mead suggests, individuals reference themselves as objects in the social setting. Because we see ourselves as objects, we are able to conceptualize implications of our emotional reactions, suggesting that, as Smith-Lovin says, emotional reactions cannot be thought of as innate, but as social elements to our behavior.

Furthermore, Stryker and Burke suggest a more detailed model of how emotions affect the role hierarchy model. Stryker and Burke are referenced regarding emotion management and the self because “For Stryker, emotions...served as motivators: role relationships that generated positive affect would be enacted more frequently and would move upward in the salience hierarchy that constituted one's self-definition... [while those] that routinely caused dissatisfaction and pain would move downward in the hierarchy” (Smith-Lovin 1995:128). Additionally, emotions would arise from an inability to perform a role sufficiently—particularly negative ones (Smith-Lovin 1995:128). Finally, emotions “signal a sense of importance of relationships for the self” (Smith-Lovin 1995:128). More so, a lack of role support would evoke negative emotions as well (Smith-Lovin 1995:128). Because emotions dictate such drastic

changes in the hierarchy, they ultimately influence identity negotiation, especially within a powerful group where understanding one's role is crucial to the success of the group.

Furthermore, understanding role confirmation is crucial to connecting identity to emotions. Smith-Lovin comments on a theory about self-concept and self-verification to suggest that "people construct events to confirm fundamental meanings about self and others" (Smith-Lovin 1995:129). We utilize these events to better understand how we fit into our social roles within a certain group, or even greater society as a whole. Events signal emotions, which in turn can be correlated to social capital. If we recognize ourselves to be relatively high in social capital, we may venture to use this capital to join Greek Life on our college campus, in hopes of achieving more. Otherwise, if we find ourselves to be low in social capital, or 'outcasts' of some sort, we may be more likely to join a group outside of what's common, e.g., a cult. We use our emotions because they are a "powerful motivating force, signaling the need for social action to restore fundamental affective meanings" which encourage our sense of self, thereby further recognizing our own role hierarchy (Smith-Lovin 1995:129). In another instance, status and power are correlated to certain feelings, articulating that "Relative positions on these dimensions defined the key aspects of a relationship and determined its emotional character. Changes in status and power led to specific emotional outcomes. For example, loss of power resulted in fear or anxiety; guilt resulted from excess power" (Smith-Lovin 1995:130). This is especially indicative of individuals who choose to leave a powerful group once their leadership is proved ineffective or stripped from their identity, resulting in negative emotions correlated to that particular identity; the individual is, thereby, more likely to seek a new identity hierarchy, even insofar as leaving that particular group.

In Smith-Lovin's theory, she suggests that status and power acknowledged cultural backgrounds as well, suggesting that "religious rituals could be developed to produce identity-affirming emotional responses" (Smith-Lovin 1995:132). In NRMs, for example, this concept can be applied to analyzing how members feel before and after particular sermons or church services that appeal to his/her/their identities. If it is a service that recognizes minority identities, such as LBGTQ+, as being 'seen by God,' the individual will likely feel more connected to both their sexual identity as well as their religious identity (Smith-Lovin 1995).

Moreover, emotions play a large role in mental health, which can adversely impact identity development and maintenance. Smith-Lovin cites Thoit's suggestion that, "in general, those who have few network contacts and few social roles are more distressed than those who are better integrated into society" (Smith-Lovin 1995:137). In a powerful group with at best, minimal outside socialization permitted or encouraged, members typically fall into this category of having few network contacts and less societal integration (since their only network is with one another), subjecting members to potentially poor mental health. The typical measures of mental health include "control over life events, inequity or victimization, and availability and usefulness internal of coping mechanisms" (Smith Lovin 1995:137). In NRMs especially, where a private commune is common, individuals are expected to be 'all about the collective' and have minimal, if any, 'selfish' concerns. Members are not independent, but dependent on the collective, giving up control, equity, and availability of mental health resources (and other resources) in favor of security or a sense of belonging. Within a powerful group, a political and social hierarchy reiterates the need for individuals to confirm his or her sense of self particularly in instances of disagreement. As Smith-Lovin (1995) suggests, "If someone disagreed with a low-status person, that person would attribute responsibility for the disagreement to his own low-quality task

contribution and would respond emotionally with depression” (140). The hierarchy reinforces structure and role maintenance by likewise reinforcing certain emotional responses to these roles, allowing the hierarchy to continue. Additionally, emotion management and group hierarchy are facilitated in everyday conversations, especially via interruptions; these interruptions “were conversational mechanisms used to limit the participation of low-evaluation, low power members to appropriate” membership (Smith-Lovin 1995:140). Without the participation of general members, either in Greek Life or NRMs, the hierarchy is able to prevail, keeping the group in check. In Greek Life, it is commonplace that during chapter meetings—the only consecutive and reliable full group meeting every week—the ritual script only permits members in leadership positions to bring up particular concerns, allowing them to generate the group metanarrative. In cults, or NRMs, gender and age also play a role, ensuring that most often, there is a need to silence women and children, since typically leadership roles are reserved for men.

In conclusion, emotions are necessary to understanding powerful group involvement because they help us navigate our social role hierarchy. Our emotions help us navigate the world around us, especially membership within powerful groups. We need to stay in touch and prioritize emotions, because “[e]motions put us in touch with the personal ‘me,’ providing us with an inner perspective for interpreting and responding to experience” (Smith-Lovin 1995:99).

CONCLUSION

This thesis has approached the subject of the sociological examination of the self in the context of powerful groups, which as we have discussed are New Religious Movements (more popularly known as cults) and Greek Life. To address such a broad topic, we first had to understand the sociological perspective of the self from classical theorists found in Chapter 1, Cooley, Mead, and Blumer, who each contributed the makings of what is today a modern understanding of the self in the social, and not merely psychological, context. These theorists highlighted that the self cannot exist without others; Cooley includes different levels of consciousness to suggest that there are different social perspectives to the self; Mead contributed further with the notion that there is a perceived other when one thinks about him/herself: Individuals can see him/her/themselves as an object as well as a subject; finally, Blumer argues that we are not merely passive beings, but active social beings.

In Chapter 2, many different contemporary theories of the 'self' provide the reader with an understanding of different types of 'selves' that help conceptualize powerful groups. Examples of these theories include the role hierarchy model, self-concept, identity-talk, inner and outer self-esteem, identity-salience, and going concerns models of self-construction and identity navigation. These contemporary theories of the self help prepare the reader to recognize the differences in sociological theory, altogether from classical theory to contemporary theory to performance and emotional theories related to the 'self'.

In Chapter 3, this thesis included elements of performance and dramaturgy, as well as how theorists connected this individual level of interaction to what Scott calls 'reinventive institutions', a structural argument in nature. In Chapter 4, this thesis primarily focuses on Smith-Lovin's work on emotions in identity management; emotions are critical in our understanding of

the self in the context of powerful groups because they are innately social and influence the way we think about one another and ourselves.

All of the above chapters provide a unique perspective to sociological theory on the self, with symbolic interactionism at the forefront. Thinking about NRMs and Greek Life is not only necessary and important to better grasping what we think of as having a 'self' but is important because these groups yield a great amount of power over individuals, whether this is regarding resources, geography, personal networks, social roles available, emotions, and the way we construct our identities to reflect such a membership. Sociology is the perfect lens with which to study these powerful groups because not only do these groups prey on individuals and their social capital, but these groups are based in, and have a meaningful impact, on the rest of society as well. Sociologists and non-sociologists alike can relate to this thesis and should prioritize the study of the 'self', because regardless of the subject area, we all interact in society and negotiate our identities every day. If our goal is to pursue meaningful lives and productive careers, as the Rollins Mission statement suggests, we must first understand ourselves and the groups we have the opportunity of joining.

In terms of the future of the 'self', this thesis suggests that credibility and credence should be reserved for modern sociological theory on the 'self' as opposed to post-modern theory on the 'self', much like what has been offered in both chapters 2 and 3. Questions that continue to linger are the following: Does role hierarchy truly dictate the most legitimate identity...how much of this is socially contrived? How powerful are emotions really in identity negotiation? Is there a way to limit the 'going concerns' of the complex global world to preserve our identities? Is there an objectifiable 'core self' or 'true self'? How can we find it?

The biggest limitation of this thesis is that it is not empirical research on these groups, merely speculation based on sociological theory that has been informed by others' limited empirical research. While this work can be thought of as a complex thought experiment, its greatest benefit and contribution is its ability to inform new research on the self, focused on attempting to answer the above questions. New research could take the form of participant observation within either group, or a longitudinal study focused on individual's conceptions and descriptions of themselves within or without of said group. There is limited research on identity negotiation once individuals exit a cult, but I would also be interested to see how these powerful groups compare to one another in this area of study. Based on our understanding of how complex and complicated, but also socially influenced, our negotiations of our 'selves' are, I would posit that the identity negotiations within both groups share many thematic elements of the above theories, but even more importantly, they are influenced by structure just as much as their perceptions of their own daily interactions. Moreover, I would argue that these theories should be used in tandem with one another; I suggest that emotions are most likely to legitimate an individual's identity, by reinforcing a role hierarchy and that the majority of this conception of self is interpreted versions of social interactions and reactions; I argue that 'going concerns' can never be truly ignored, only limited for a short period of time, since our worlds are so interconnected and can no longer exist fully independently. Lastly, and what I believe to be the most difficult answer, is that we may never know for certain whether there exists a 'true self', primarily because we all fall victim to negotiating our identity from the perspective of others in our society. However, I will not lose sight of the possibility of a 'true self' because my intellectual curiosity won't let me do so: There is a reason why we love to watch movies, listen to songs, and read books where the heroine is breaking from the mold of society; we like to

fantasize about becoming our ‘true selves’. So to keep the mystery alive, I theorize that the best way to stay in pursuit of the ‘true self’ is by continuing to further our empirical research on the self in powerful groups, for this is the best way to drastically compare and contrast a ‘self’ from the different dimensions of the ‘self’ — without the powerful group setting, there wouldn’t be as strong of a backdrop for beliefs, values, and expectations of the individual. It is here where you can see the influence of the group and what originality may be left for the ‘self’.

Finally, the implications of the societal treatment of NRMs and Greek Life must be discussed. New Religious Movements are often viewed with emotions in mind; they are often described as tragic, fictional stories, so far away from our immediate lives that they become a spectacle to be gossiped about. Greek life, on the other hand, is seen as a token of privilege; members of sororities and fraternities, while often satirized as being unintelligent or aloof in media and film, are overall envied roles. These stereotypes affect outside perceptions of individuals based on their membership to either powerful group, resulting in an inevitably changed sense of self—due to many of the components of self that have been discussed in prior chapters, much like inner and outer self-esteem, role hierarchy, and even individual or group performances. A changed sense of self, whether for better or worse, can have a significant impact on someone’s daily life as well as his/her/their future: It can dictate someone’s emotions, affect their self-worth, determine how they interact within their group, whether they take a leadership role, or whether they choose to leave the group and their life afterward. At its core, it is important for us to understand that outside judgments, formed by the societal collective, feed the reputation, or perceived reputation, of said group, leading to the stereotypes that are affiliated with them and even potentially motivating the life-course of individuals upon joining or exiting a powerful group.

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