

NORBERT WILEY, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, URBANA

## Bakhtin's Voices and Cooley's Looking Glass Self

**ABSTRACT:** Charles Horton Cooley theorized the looking glass self in his 1902 book, *Human Nature and the Social Order*. His idea was that people tend to internalize the opinions that they think others, particularly intimate others, have of them. There are now lots of qualifications and hedges to this idea, but it is still a powerful insight.

I want to add to this discussion by applying Bakhtin's notion of "voices" to Cooley's looking glass self. You can find Bakhtin's voices in anything that has language, a message or even a meaning.

Your social environment, i.e., social organization, social structure and the built environment, can be transformed into voices that may be saying something about you or your social grouping. If you dissolve social elements into voices, you can more easily attend to them, correct them, resist them and perhaps "orchestrate" them. If one adds Bakhtin's social voices to Cooley's individual voices, one institutionalizes the looking glass and collectivizes the subject looking into the glass.

This task of decoding the institutions is especially incumbent on people who are being pushed around by their social environment, e.g., minorities.<sup>1</sup>

This will be a look at Cooley's looking glass self from the perspective of Bakhtin's theory of voices. First I will review Cooley's idea and see how it has held up in the literature. Then I will describe Bakhtin's notion of voice along with related concepts. Then I will look at Cooley's limitations. And finally I will integrate Bakhtin's ideas into Cooley's theory.

### 1. Cooley's Looking Glass Self

The looking glass self idea was stated by Charles Horton Cooley in 1902 (Cooley 1902:183-185), rather early in the history of American sociology. The core of this idea is that people tend to internalize what they imagine or

Interdisciplinary Journal for Germanic Linguistics and Semiotic Analysis, (IJGLSA), Vol. 14, Number 1, Spring, 2009: 101-121

think other people think of them. If they think others think they are ugly, they tend to think of themselves as ugly. If they think others think they are kind, they tend to think of themselves as kind. Sometimes one person, one opinion, is enough to activate and imprint the looking glass self. This process works most strongly if one is emotionally close to the other, for example as a fellow family member, or a friend—or if the other is of higher status. The process also probably gets less important the older one gets, for one commits to traits as life goes on, narrowing the options for change and making a person less subject to suggestion from others. Still, adults in love seem to have enormous power over each other's self-concept. And perhaps in very old age, suggestibility again increases.

Cooley was not explicit about how we learn other's opinions of us, e.g., whether we learn them directly, indirectly or by guesswork. This knowledge might be based on something a third party said. Or it might be based on the look in someone's eye or on their tone of voice. Or someone may have spoken openly, confronting us with an insult or seeking us out with a compliment. We can work around Cooley's imprecision here, although when I introduce Bakhtin, indirect or implicit communications will become more important.

The looking glass self idea has now spread into social psychology as a taken-for-granted truth with the patina of a classic. There are also a variety of other ways in which social influences affect the self, for example one's parents' political or economic attitudes, but I will confine myself to the looking glass self.

We are influenced, then, by the ordinary opinions that others seem to have of us. The influence is not necessarily based on logic or evidence, but simply on the power of the other person's views, particularly if we have identified with them to some extent. Social influence is as much emotional as logical.

In Cooley's writing this idea was hedged considerably, and others have added to these cautions (Gecas and Schwalbe 1983; Reitzes 1980; Yeung and Martin 2003). Cooley did not by any means portray a passive or over-socialized self (Jacobs 2006:91-92). On the contrary he said we constantly filter others' opinions of us. Sometimes others do influence us. But sometimes, for example if the opinion is just too unwelcome, we resist being in-

### **BAKHTIN'S VOICES AND COOLEY'S LOOKING GLASS SELF**

fluenced. We can also manipulate the opinions of others, so that we, in effect, create a flattering looking glass.

What we say to ourselves is also a kind of looking glass phenomenon, given that the inner dialogue is a bit like a conversation with another person. This means daydreams and musings, positive or negative toward the self, can be a kind of self work. Since we are engaging in this self talk more or less all day long, we are constantly primping the self-concept.

George Herbert Mead also had the concepts for a looking glass self, especially with his notion of role taking, but he did not use them in this way (Wiley 2003). In particular Mead did not use the idea of self-feeling, which for Cooley was the core of the self and the energy behind the looking glass self. Self-feeling was our sense of "mineness," and it referred to anything we might be attached to or cling to, such as our bodies, our family, our friends or our property. But its central idea was the way we evaluate and cling to ourselves.

Mead thought reflexivity or self awareness, which is the cognitive view of the self, was more important than self-feeling (Mead 1934:173). This may be true for the genesis of the self, but the development of the self seems to draw heavily on self-feeling. In fact, even though Mead contrasted self-feeling and reflexivity, self-feeling is a form of reflexivity. My own preference is to use reflexivity and self-feeling together, thereby combining Cooley and Mead (Wiley 1994:110-117). In the case of the looking glass self, then, Cooley had a powerful insight that Mead lacked (Jacobs 2009).

Cooley's idea has now been around for over a hundred years, and to some extent it has settled in as a received truth. There are two scholars, however, who have used Cooley's idea in novel ways in recent years. For one, Erving Goffman wrote extensively about the "presentation of self" (Goffman 1959). This theme concerns our attempt to cope with and sometimes even control the social looking glass. Goffman's books were quite influential but, like Max Weber, he lacked a clearly communicable method, and he did not inspire a lot of research.

A related line of scholarship is that of Thomas Scheff on shame (Scheff 2005). Cooley thought that shame was a major motivator in accepting or resisting the opinions of others, and Scheff explains how this works. If a perceived opinion seems to shame us, we might do almost anything, includ-

ing changing the self, to avoid the shame. Alternatively we might brood, perhaps somewhat unconsciously, about the shame for an indefinite period of time. Scheff has gone deeply into the structure and byways of this emotion, probably more so than anyone else, and in doing so he has created new understanding of the looking glass self.

I should also mention Garfinkel's "degradation ceremony" as an insight into the looking glass self, even though Garfinkel did not explicitly make the connection (Garfinkel 1956). This process is a formal and ritualized action in which someone's self is degraded or stigmatized. Examples are a criminal conviction, a mental health commitment or a dishonorable discharge from the military. Garfinkel thinks this process is one of lowering an identity by way of public shaming. This emotion links Garfinkel's idea both to the looking glass self and to Scheff's work on shame.

Opposite processes are ceremonies that elevate the self, such as awards and educational credentials. These seem to work with the emotion of pride, which is the opposite of shame. These ceremonies are not the opinions of individuals but those of society. Yet they probably affect the looking glass self at least as much as those of individuals.

Cooley never intended the looking glass self to be a major theory or a systematic explanation of social influence. His main source of information was the informal observations of his three children in Ann Arbor, Michigan. His book on *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902), which is where the looking glass self idea appears, is largely about growing up in the United States. He is concerned about the relation between the development of human nature and the social order, particularly in how the latter influences the former. The looking glass self is one such influence, though by no means the only one. Still the looking glass self idea has entered what might be called the heroic past of social theory, and it makes sense to evaluate this idea today. I think that by adding Bakhtin's concept of voices, the looking glass self can be applied in novel ways

## **2. Bakhtin and voice**

If Bakhtin were forced into an intellectual niche it might well be that of literary theorist. But his literary ideas were far-reaching, and they have distinct implications for the social sciences.

### **BAKHTIN'S VOICES AND COOLEY'S LOOKING GLASS SELF**

Since I am interested in Bakhtin's notion of voice, I will not try to give a comprehensive description of his contribution but will concentrate on voice and closely related ideas. To some extent Bakhtin is still rather new to social theory, at least sociological theory, and I will touch on several concepts that seem useful for sociology. After laying out these ideas, presenting them as conceptual tools, I will show how they can be applied to Cooley's looking glass self.

Bakhtin developed the notion of voice mainly in his analyses of Dostoyevsky's novels. (Bakhtin 1981, 1984, 1986). Here Bakhtin is seemingly talking about literature rather than life. But his insights are so profound that they constitute a broader social theory, not just about literature but also about reality itself.

One reason these novels glide into life is that Dostoyevsky gave an unusual amount of freedom to his fictional characters. He gets them started with his own voice but then he releases them. This allows them to speak as they will, each with a distinct voice and each with a certain amount of social distance from the author. This process is similar to a day dream that starts with our active imagination but sometimes then gradually moves along on its own.

Basing his ideas on Dostoyevsky, Bakhtin used the concept of voice with a rich set of attributes. For one thing there are no simple or single voices. All voices are multi-vocal, polyphonous and replete with sub-voices. This plurality can be understood phonetically to indicate the different sounds a voice might have, authoritatively to indicate forcefulness or power, emotionally to refer to feeling tones, and linguistically to draw on semantics and syntax. There might be a central or core voice, but there are also an indefinite number of variations. The central voice might be loud and insistent, but there might also be voices that are peripheral and barely audible. This makes Bakhtin's voice complex and alive. And its effect on the looking glass self process is also complex and alive, for interpreting a voice saying something about you may be no easy matter.

Along with voice Bakhtin uses the notion of dialogue, so that voice always means voices in dialogue. The dialogue may be explicit, as when two voices actually do communicate back and forth with each other. Or it may be implicit as when a voice is speaking to an imagined or anticipated voice.

This implicit voice might be that of a single person, a group, a category of people or any other social entity. For Bakhtin we are always in dialogue in some sense, even if the dialogue is not fully articulated. When a voice says something about us, we can respond in dialogical form. This response might be confined to our inner speech, but it is still part of a dialogue.

In the case of dialogue, the speaker's voice has what Bakhtin referred to as addressivity and answerability (Perinbanayagam 2000:61-62). By the former, he referred to the hailing and naming of the dialogical other, the person or person-like entity being spoken to. We might use the person's name, we might say "hey," or we might merely look at them. But in any case we are locking into intersubjectivity with that person. We are creating a flow of interaction, and this flow is open to a give and take process. Moreover this addressivity is open to being answered, it has answerability.

The nature of the address already says something about how the speaker is structuring the relationship. If one uses the other's last name, the address is formal, if one uses the other's first name, the address is informal, and if one uses a commanding tone, such as "you," "boy" or "missy" the address is one of domination. The nature of the addressivity may have a strong effect on the looking glass self process, i.e., the interactants are not only saying something to each other, they are also saying something about each other.

Although all communication is, for Bakhtin, dialogical, this relation can be suppressed and the communication will seem to be a monologue. A typical professor's lecture or scholarly article is formally a monologue. It is rounded off, objections are met as the argument proceeds, and when it is complete it stands as a polished, finished work. The statement may suggest questions, but the monologue itself does not ask for them. In contrast a dialogue is expressly addressed to other voices. It is open to questions, disagreement, development and interaction. It is porous, with permeable boundaries. It is a conversation. Bakhtin preferred dialogue to monologue, and he regarded it as the more creative way to engage in voice. In fact he defined the self as dialogue, i.e., it is not just an entity that engages in dialogue, it is dialogue. This is similar to the dialogical self of the American pragmatists.

Both dialogue and monologue enter into the looking glass self. But a dialogue does so directly and observably. A monologue is more indirect and

### **BAKHTIN'S VOICES AND COOLEY'S LOOKING GLASS SELF**

implicit. You have to peel back, let us say, the professor's ceremonial language to find his dialogical attitude. He or she may, for example, be projecting an attitude of superiority, which implies inferiority in the listeners.

Bakhtin also speaks of voice as a silent and implicit kind of utterance. He finds voices in social forces, the surrounding community and historical currents. Any social element that has a meaning also has a message, and this message can be decoded into a voice. These "structural voices," so to speak, are usually inaudible, but they have a powerful influence over the humans in their range. And with enough attention they can be decoded (Bakhtin 1981: 341-350 and Shotter 2008).

Institutional voices position you into a particular set of do's and don'ts, even though this positioning may be implicit. Everyone experiences this, but it is most powerful for minority groups. The obvious example is the media: movies, TV, the novel, etc. But in this paper I want to emphasize the ordinary, seemingly voiceless, environment. The old might be in a setting that glamorizes youth, suggesting that the elderly are unwelcome. Blacks might be in an all-white ambiance, devoid of all black meaning. The disabled might be in a situation that neglects their needs, implying that they are non-entities. Women might be in a place that has an exclusively masculine atmosphere. And gays and lesbians might be in an environment that emphasizes male-female romance as the only kind there is. These settings are all silent voices that denigrate a minority group, lowering what might be called the group looking glass self. Later I will give concrete examples of this from my years at the University of Illinois.

Bakhtin's insight into the environmental voice is just a variation on Marx's idea that the superstructure tends to protect the capitalist class system. For Marx the implicit voice of this structure is "obey the bourgeoisie." Weber had broadened Marx by finding status and power conflict as well as class conflict. And, in a similar way, Bakhtin took Marx's talking social structure and gave it a broader range of messages.

In sociological terms, Bakhtin transformed structure into agency; structure being calcified voice, and agency being audible voice. He dissolves congealed and hardened discourses into vocalized and discernable ones. As he put it:

The process—experimenting by turning persuasive discourse into speaking persons—becomes especially important in those cases where a struggle against such images has already begun, when someone is striving to liberate himself from the influence of such an image and its discourse by means of objectification, or is striving to expose the limitation of both image and discourse (Bakhtin 1981:348).

Another social concept that Bakhtin used in his theory of the novel was that of inner speech or self-talk. This form of speech is used a good deal in Dostoyevsky's novels. These novels, of course, predated James Joyce's famous use of this device in *Ulysses* (1922). The idea of inner speech is briefly mentioned in Plato, but neither he nor anyone else followed it up much until Charles Sanders Peirce, the American pragmatist, revived this idea in the mid- 19th century (Wiley 2006a:37-44). Peirce used inner speech to explain how people think but also how they make decisions and act. George Herbert Mead, at a later date, applied inner speech to the thinking process as well, and he did so even more systematically than Peirce (Mead 1913.)

In the Soviet Union inner speech was also revived by Vygotsky (1987) in the 1920s and Bakhtin in the 1930s—neither of whom seemed to know anything about Peirce's and Mead's treatments of this topic. Vygotsky made an important contribution in explaining the distinct linguistic characteristics of inner speech and how these differ from those of ordinary or outer speech (Wiley 2008). And Bakhtin showed how inner speech is an intense dialogue, not only with the self but also with other people—and sometimes even with the institutions themselves. Bakhtin's deepest treatment of inner speech is his analysis of Roskolnikov, the self-tormented killer of *Crime and Punishment*. Dostoyevsky's description of Roskolnikov's inner speech and Bakhtin's analysis of this inner speech is one of the most perceptive pictures of the human self in all of literature (Bakhtin 1984, 251-266).

Another concept in Bakhtin is that life is narrative (Rankin 2003; Perinbanayagam 2006:18-21), although he was critical of some theories of narratology. Life is a set of facts and events, but it is can also be characterized as a story, stretched across time. This means it has a plot, much like a literary work, and that this plot has a meaning. When a narrative has full explanatory power, it both individualizes and generalizes. It tells the story of an individual, but it also shows how this story partakes of the larger human



## **BAKHTIN'S VOICES AND COOLEY'S LOOKING GLASS SELF**

story. A given life is an individual passage through a journey that everyone takes.

The voices, then—those of oneself, of others and of the social environment—make one's narrative. This concept should be added to Bakhtin's notions of inner speech, voice, dialogue, structure-agency and the addressivity-answerability relation. These conceptual tools are all relevant to social theory, and I will try to show this by applying some of them to Cooley's looking glass self.

### **3. Cooley's limitations**

Returning to Cooley, some weak spots in his own looking glass self are the following:

1. He does not mention inner speech in his analysis of how we use the looking glass self. He is aware that people are selecting, filtering and sometimes even manipulating the looking glass self. And he is also aware of how inner speech functions in psychological life. But he does not put the two together. He does not show how we use inner speech in the processing and orchestrating of the looking glass self.

Here are some of the ways in which this might work. We might hear or hear of the other saying "you are stupid" or "you are intelligent." And this person might have a certain intonation and facial expression. Our evaluation might be more vivid if we placed this comment in our inner speech. We might, for example, repeat what this person said in our own voice and with our own force of statement. We might intensify the comment if it is flattering, to see how gratifying we can make it sound. Or we might exaggerate a negative comment, the way depressed persons dwell on their sadness.

Minorities are especially vulnerable to what people in the majority are silently thinking about them. If someone gives you a "look" that suggests some kind of emotion, it might also suggest what they are saying about you to themselves. Minorities imagine or guess at others' inner speech, i.e., what others are thinking about them. And this image is probably an important influence on their looking glass self.

In a related point Cooley does not mention how we can, in our own minds, flatter or denigrate ourselves. Depressives get stuck in a stream of self-disparaging thoughts. These are insults which we deliver to ourselves

and which undoubtedly hurt our self-esteem. The cognitive therapy approach to depression is to get control of negative inner speech and substitute positive self-attributions. This is not always easy to do, but when it is done, it seems to be as good a treatment for depression as any anti-depressant chemicals.

And in ordinary, i.e., non-depressive, thought processes, self-compliments seem to be a useful way of controlling mood and handling such psychopathologies as phobias. One can be one's own cheerleader, holding solidarity rituals in one's inner "society", much like those that communities conduct in outer society. These inner self-attributions can combine with the handling of outer, especially negative attributions.

2. In a related point, Cooley does not have a sense of how dialogue figures into the looking glass self. We not only hear, or think we hear, people talking to and about us. We also interrogate them, ask for examples, sass and yell at them. And in the case of compliments we feign modesty, smile appreciatively and compliment in return.

Another way we might voice a negative comment is by saying it in such a way that it does not hurt as much, or even at all. If we repeat the comment in a mocking or silly way or in a way that makes the other sound foolish, we might find it easier to absorb or even resist the comment. All this may go on primarily in the head, as inner speech, but these processes constitute conversation or dialogue with the voices that stimulate the self.

3. Cooley also has a somewhat narrow notion of voice. But there may be other messages that do not come in the form of conversational, or imagined conversational, voices. As I said earlier, social practices and institutions may have messages that apply to us. Laws and rules tell us who is right or wrong, good or evil. These messages may sometimes detour through and get internalized into our selves, particularly our moral standards and conscience. But often they are completely external, much as the flattering or insulting neighbors are external.

These might simply be called "institutional facts," much as Emile Durkheim had in mind with his term "social facts." These facts tell us what to do or what not to do. And they also tell us, depending on our conformity, what kind of person we are. These facts then are talking to us, and they are saying that we are or are not a good person. To hear their voices we have to

## **BAKHTIN'S VOICES AND COOLEY'S LOOKING GLASS SELF**

transform social structure into social interaction, or institutions into conversations.

This decoding practice also helps explain how we can cope with the looking glass self. To cope effectively we have to detect and monitor all the messages that enter into this self-process. If there are some that have an effect on us, but one that we are unaware of, we cannot cope with or manage this kind of message. Cooley did not concern himself with the technology of protecting the self, but a closer acquaintance with Bakhtin shows how he might have done this.

4. Cooley based his research primarily on his observations of his three children, growing up in Ann Arbor, Michigan at the turn of the 19th-to-20th century. This was a distinctly white, middle class, privileged sample. He did not ask if minority groups or imperiled communities might have a different looking glass self dynamics than his three children did. Cooley's ideas were not completely inapplicable to low power groups, however. He simply did not say much about people in these situations. But minority group members are subject to many more negative judgments than others are. And this kind of steady assault must harden the self and create a vigilance at its boundaries. In this paper I am trying to restore the balance and pay special attention to minority groups.

5. Finally Cooley's unit of analysis was the individual, i.e., the person with the looking glass self. He did not apply this concept to social groups or categories. But the minorities are subject to a great deal of group social appraisal as well as individual evaluations. They have a group or collective looking glass self as well as the usual individual looking glass self.

Even though Cooley did not pay attention to this issue and his concepts were built solely for individuals, Bakhtin's concepts can address this problem. In particular the institutional and structural voices are especially powerful in the way that they denigrate minority groups. This is the difference between institutional and individual racism, sexism, ageism, gayism, disabilityism, etc.

The discussion so far can be summarized in Table 1. This table describes two versions of the looking glass self, that of Cooley and the one I am teasing out of Bakhtin. Bakhtin's profile leans toward institutional voices, minorities, social types, inner speech, dialogue, narrative and fighting

back when necessary. Cooley's leans toward individual voices, the average person, the individual, outer speech, monologue, the factual, and adjusting by way of coping. I say "leaning" because these distinctions are too sharp and extreme to be accurate as they stand—and Bakhtin was definitely not a categories or tables kind of thinker. I made the comparisons this way though to be as clear as possible about the conceptual space between the two theorists. Still the two thinkers and their versions of the looking glass self are actually tendencies rather than stark, binary opposites.

Some of these distinctions are not explicit in Cooley, although he can be approached with them. If I am to add Bakhtin to Cooley, though, the contrast has to be made on what might be called Bakhtin's terms. Cooley has to be placed on Bakhtin's turf, which is what I have tried to do.

Table 1. Two Looking Glass Selves: Cooley's and Bakhtin's

	Bakhtin	Cooley
Institutional vs. Interactional	Institutional	Interactional
Minorities vs. Average Person	Minorities	Average Person
Social Types vs. Individuals	Social Types	Individuals
Inner Speech vs. Outer Speech	Inner Speech	Outer Speech
Dialogical vs. Monological	Dialogical	Monological
Narrative vs. Factual	Narrative	Factual
Fighting Back vs. Coping	Fighting Back	Coping

## **BAKHTIN'S VOICES AND COOLEY'S LOOKING GLASS SELF**

### **4. Integrating Bakhtin and Cooley**

I have laid out a set of new tools, but it is only in the use of these tools that their value can be discovered. Still, it is possible right away to mention some of the gains that Bakhtin gives to Cooley.

In the section on Cooley's limitations I have already made some connections between Bakhtin's ideas and the looking glass self. The question of institutions, however, is the major new point in the table. By paying attention to institutional voices, the looking glass self can be made considerably more powerful. People are shaped not only by voices that they hear (or hear of), but also by those that they do not hear, or hear only indirectly. Everyone lives in a sea of unheard voices. According to Charles Sanders Peirce everything and anything can have a semiotic or signifying function (Ponzio 1984). The social environment is a complex of signs and voices.

How does one decode these messages and where does one begin? The answer will depend on the individual case and on the aggressiveness of the person in question. The obvious place to look is where your interests are most at stake. Your income and economic class, your prestige or status and your social and political power have interfaces with the social environment. These interfaces may seem to be saying that you are being treated fairly and that you should be satisfied with what you have. But if you look, or listen, more closely you may find contradictions. Gunnar Myrdal (1944) found that the American Creed, as embodied in the Declaration of Independence and in the Gettysburg Address, preached equality, but the racial realities produced inequality. This set of contradictions was embedded in the voices of the social structure.

Obviously the decoding of one's social environment is a matter of interpretation and may be subject to considerable controversy. But even Cooley's looking glass self had plenty of controversy. If someone said something to you in a nasty tone of voice and you confronted them, they might simply deny the nasty tone of voice. Cooley's looking glass self would be rife with disagreement and struggle, particularly if one resisted unwelcome attributions. Decoding institutional voices is more of the same. The recent history of minority group protest—concerning language, laws, the mass media, sexual mores, employment and market practices, etc.—gives plenty

of examples of confronting the institutional looking glass, even though it has not been conceptualized in that manner.

Bakhtin does not give an entirely new set of issues but rather a new set of concepts for understanding minority group resistance. In contrast to Cooley, then, Bakhtin's approach produces a more sensitive and powerful looking glass self and a more effective means of fighting back.

One way of giving flesh to these ideas is to look at an extended example. I will consider the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, where I taught from 1968 to 1995. During my tenure there were several confrontations between student minority groups and the official institutional system. These can be translated into how institutional voices affect the group's looking glass self. I am not singling out this University because I think it is a bad example. It was probably typical of all major universities. I am choosing it only because I have a participant observation window on what happened there. My examples will emphasize women, African Americans and gays-lesbians.

During the 1970s the law school started increasing its proportion of female students, largely because more women were applying for admission. One problem was that as female enrollment increased, there were not enough women's bathrooms. The law school was slow to keep bathrooms on an even keel with the sex ratio. As a result women students were seriously inconvenienced—by long lines and lateness for class—and they loudly complained. The voice they were hearing was that they should be embarrassed about their bodies, particularly their need to use bathrooms, and that the issue was of little importance. The problem simmered for several months (*Daily Illini* 1977).

A second example concerns race. In 1968, as a result of the assassination of Martin Luther King, the University instituted the "Project 500" program for black students. Previously the University had a low proportion of black students, but on this solemn occasion they went out of their way to recruit 500 new black freshman. Recruiters went into black neighborhoods and institutions to find black enrollees. Since this was, it would seem, a good-hearted and liberal move on the part of the University, it was expected that the black students would be appreciative of what was being done for them. The program included various forms of financial aid so that poor students

### BAKHTIN'S VOICES AND COOLEY'S LOOKING GLASS SELF

would be able to afford attending this university. University housing was also included as a form of financial aid (Williamson 2003).

Unfortunately some of the details, including both the room assignments and the financial aid, were not handled well, and some of the students found themselves in difficult circumstances. Female blacks were especially disgruntled, and it appears that they were in the leadership. The blacks responded by holding a sit-in in the student union. The Student Union building was the hub of student activities. There one went for food and drink as well as for other conveniences. It had meeting rooms for student clubs and it also had about forty overnight rooms for campus visitors. In addition it housed the book store. The student union was also full of mementos, signifying the past glories of this university. Among these were about a dozen, large oil portraits of the current and the former Presidents of the University. These were the people who ruled the University, and they were all white males.

As one walked through these corridors these well clad, confident white men looked down at you. They seemed to be saying "we run this place, and of course you will do what we say." In any event that is the voice the sitting-in blacks seem to have heard. For the response was to take ball-point pens and deface several of these portraits. The protesting blacks also took over the Union building and did not let anyone in, although there is ambiguity as to exactly what happened. But their loudest, and one might say most screeching message was made with the ball point pens.

In all fairness to the Project 500 students it should be pointed out that there were townie blacks as well as University blacks in the sit-in. And there is no way of knowing who actually defaced the portraits. But it is reasonably clear that the portraits of the white male authorities were, under these circumstances, offensive to blacks, and the marking of these portraits was the political response.

The University did what it could to remedy the snags in the program, and the sit-in was eventually terminated. But the program was set off course—and race relations on campus were given a reality jolt. In particular the institutional complacency of the University, confident that blacks would be happy to just be there, was rebuked. And the university, never too successfully, attempted to restructure its voice for blacks.

A third example concerns the uniforms of the girls' basketball team in the early 1990s. A local sports writer said, in a column, that these uniforms were baggy, ugly, and insufficiently feminine. He also suggested that these uniforms were related to the allegedly large lesbian presence on this team. He compared them unfavorably to the girls' volley ball team. As he put it:

Hebert (the volley ball coach) has turned out attractive teams in every meaning of the word—rangy, athletic and remarkably handsome women who are well-spoken and talented. From Chancellor Mort Weir on down, local people are proud to support them. These women have contributed to a family atmosphere, that... was not present in women's basketball.

To build a strong following in an overwhelmingly heterosexual community with typically conservative Midwestern values, you must offer a conservative, heterosexual image on the court. Illinois women's basketball teams projected a different image. (Loren Tate, *Champaign-Urbana Courier* 12-14-92)

The symbolic point here is the allegedly lesbian-looking, baggy uniforms. The sportswriter was defining or voicing this institutional fact in a way that was offensive to lesbians. Of course this was also an attack on the entire homosexual community at the University of Illinois and in the surrounding community. Given the anti-gay/lesbian backlash in the country at the time, it looked like Tate's column might be a trial balloon for a state-wide anti-homosexual action of some kind, whether he intended this or not.

On the day this column appeared, one of the sociology professors, who had a lesbian in his family, asked the University President to answer this column. The President asked the Chancellor, Morton Weir, who had been named in the column, to write the letter. And Weir told the sociology professor he would do so. His letter (*News Gazette* 12-30-92) read:

In his Dec 14 column, Loren Tate appears to attribute views to me that I cannot let stand....Tate's implication that it is important for women athletes to be attractive and heterosexual is outrageous... At this campus, we are committed to providing an environment that enables individuals to study, work and participate in extracurricular activities in an atmosphere free of discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual orientation. Tate



## **BAKHTIN'S VOICES AND COOLEY'S LOOKING GLASS SELF**

is free to write what he wishes; but he would do better to leave me out of it.

What happened here was that a local spokesman tried to push the University in an anti-homosexual direction. But his attempt backfired, for the response was that the University made the strongest pro-homosexual statement it had ever made.

As I said, these three examples are not meant to slam the University of Illinois. The University performed reasonably well on all these issues. My purpose is solely to give examples of how the social environment can be offensive to minority groups. The missing bathrooms, the white male pictorial dominance and the comment about the uniforms were all institutional voices. They have obvious implications for the selves of the minorities in question, all of whom were female. And notice, the three voices all have a shaming edge to them. Bathrooms, alleged black ingratitude and baggy, ugly, lesbianism all attack the selves of the groupings, especially the female ones, in question. Institutional attacks on the looking glass selves of minority groups not only tend to be tacit and indirect, they can also be sniggering and highly disrespectful. In these ways they illustrate how Bakhtin's concepts can add to Cooley's looking glass self.

### **5. Conclusion**

Bakhtin's ideas are not completely new to sociology but they complement and strengthen several existing ideas. Labelling theory in the social problems literature (Best 2004) is somewhat akin to Bakhtin's approach. People are labelled by voices, and the peeling off or modification of labels is facilitated by a close attunement to voices. Bakhtin suggests new ways of finding and dealing with labels.

Another relevant idea is social construction, which has to do with the free play or cultural relativism in what we see "out there". The modes of social construction and their means of defining reality are largely a matter of voices. Bakhtin's approach is useful for understanding how social construction works.

Also the notion of positioning, which was presented as a more robust notion than that of role (Davies and Harre 1990), is done largely through institutional voices. To understand how one has been positioned and to attempt a

repositioning, will depend largely on how one handles Bakhtin's version of the looking glass self.

Finally Bakhtin's analysis is quite useful for understanding social movements. Oppression is enacted largely via voices and it can be fought by attacking the sources of voices. Social movements often arise directly from a Bakhtinian view of oppression. Of course, as with labeling theory, minorities can effect resistance only if they organize and take political action. The mere identification of labels and voices is just a preliminary stage. Still it can be a powerful and indispensable preliminary stage.

In this paper I have tried to complete Cooley's looking glass self by adding Bakhtin. Cooley analyzed the individual looking glass self and how the interactional context affects it. Bakhtin, as I interpret him, analyzed the social looking glass self and how the institutional context affects it. Bakhtin institutionalized the voices that affect the self and he collectivized the selves that are reflected in the looking glass. Cooley does a trenchant job of analyzing the first half of the problem, but you need Bakhtin to clarify the second half.

#### **NOTE**

1. For encouragement and advice thanks are due to the Reflexivity Workshop at the University of Warwick, September, 2007, to Margaret Archer who organized it and to the other eleven participants. Also to Joel Best, Barbara Horne, Caryl Emerson, Helena Flam, Rom Harre, Glenn Jacobs, Robert Perinbanayagam, Sheila Ryan, Dorothy E. Smith, John Shotter and Michele M. Thompson.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Adelman, Gary. 2001. *Retelling Dostoyevsky*. Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- . 1984. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

#### BAKHTIN'S VOICES AND COOLEY'S LOOKING GLASS SELF

- . 1986. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- . 1990. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Best, Joel. 2004. *Deviance: The Career of a Concept*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Cooley, Charles Horton. 1902 (1922). *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
1977. "Men's Room Given to Women Law Students." *Daily Illini*, February 22:4.
- Davies, Bronwyn and Rom Harre. 1990. "Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 20:43-63
- Garfinkel, Harold. 1956. "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies." *American Journal of Sociology* 61:420-424.
- Gecas, Viktor and Michael L. Schwalbe. 1983. "Beyond the Looking-Glass Self: Social Structure and Efficacy-Based Self-Esteem." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 46:77-88
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City NY: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Harre, Rom. 1993. *Social Being*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jacobs, Glenn. 2006. *Charles Horton Cooley: Imagining Social Reality*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- . 2009. "Influence and Canonical Supremacy: An Analysis of How George Herbert Mead Demoted Charles Horton Cooley in the Sociological Canon." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 45:117-144.
- Mead, George Herbert. 1913. "The Social Self." *George Herbert Mead. Selected Writings*. 1964. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Company, 142-149.
- . 1934. *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Myrdal, Gunnar. 1944. *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy*. New York: Harper and Brothers.
- Perinbanayagam, Robert. 2006. *Games and Sport in Everyday Life*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers
- . 2000. *The Presence of Self*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

- Ponzio, Augusto. 1984. "Semiotics Between Peirce and Bakhtin," *Recherches Sémiotiques/Semiotic Inquiry* 4:273-291.
- Rankin, Jenny. 2003. "What is Narrative? Ricoeur, Bakhtin, and Process Approaches." *Concrescence: The Australasian Journal of Process Thought* 3:1-9.
- Reitzes, Donald C. 1980. "Beyond the Looking Glass Self: Cooley's Social Self and its Treatment in Introductory Textbooks." *Contemporary Sociology* 9:631-640.
- Scheff, Thomas. 2005. "Looking-Glass Self: Goffman as Symbolic Interactionist." *Symbolic Interaction* 28:147-166.
- Shotter, John. 2008. Personal Communication Concerning Bakhtin's Notion of Embedded or Institutional Voices.
- Smith, Dorothy E. 1999. "Exploring the Social Relations of Discourse: Sociological Theory and the Dialogic of Sociology. In: Dorothy E. Smith. *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 133-156.
- Volosinov, V. N. 1973. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. 1987. *Problems of General Psychology*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Wiley, Norbert. 1994. *The Semiotic Self*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2003. "The Self as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy." *Symbolic Interaction* 26:501-513.
- . 2006a. "Peirce and the Founding of American Sociology." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 6:23-50.
- . 2006b. "Inner Speech as a Language: A Saussurean Inquiry." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 36:319-341.
- . 2008. "Combining Mead and Peirce with Vygotsky and Bakhtin on Inner Speech." Given at the Communicology Conference on The Mediated Self, California State University, East Bay, 5-29-08.
- Williamson, Joy Ann. 2003. *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965-1975*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Yeung, King-to and John Levi Martin. 2003. "The Looking Glass Self: An Empirical Test and Elaboration." *Social Forces* 81:843-879.

**BAKHTIN'S VOICES AND COOLEY'S LOOKING GLASS SELF**

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Norbert Wiley is Professor Emeritus, Sociology, at the University of Illinois, Urbana. His main book is *The Semiotic Self*, 1994. His next book will be *Inner Speech and Outer Life*.

