

Black swan essay sample

[Sociology](#)



Overtime, many individuals will bring out their “ dark side”. Some are pushed to their limits and in order to perfect themselves and to please others, they would do things that is benefit to them. In this essay, I will be discussing Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective and analyze it to the movie Black Swan. Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective of social interaction suggests that a person’s identity will change overtime based on interaction with others. It proposes that a person’s identity is not a stable and independent psychological entity. Goffman sees human interaction as a grand play. He forms a theatrical metaphor in defining the method in which one human being presents itself to another based on cultural values, norms, and expectations.

Performances can have disruptions but most are successful. The goal of this presentation of self is acceptance from the audience through manipulation. If the actor succeeds, the audience will view the actor as he or she wants to be viewed. People use others for gratification and success. Although Cooley and Goffman may agree that human beings are performers, they differ on the fact that Goffman sees the performers to be manipulative and untrustworthy. The dramaturgical approach makes us realize how when we act, we worry about our “ audience and how they will judge our performance.

If life we have goals and “ expectations” that we want to achieve and we do this by using a tool called impression management. Impression management was the main center of Goffman’s work of the dramaturgical perspective.

What Erving Goffman argues is that the self is not an entity that is originated from its enactment but arises through performance. Impression management describes a central aspect of role theory. Its goal is to gain

advantageous first impression. It is the way people influence how others think about something else, usually themselves. People usually do this either to get something they want from others or to establish an independent identity. Most of us will perform and act the way we think will work best for our expectations in a given situation. Be it at work, school, in front of friends or family, we are all putting on presentations of ourselves that can be best fitting for that particular environment. We all act differently in any given situation that we are in. Goffman believed that particular understand of various social scenes are accomplished by using tools of the theater. These tools are considered to be roles, scripts, costumes, and a stage.

Nina, the main character, is passionate about dancing; it consumes her every wake hour. She even dreams about dancing. She is a shy and fragile young woman is chosen to play the role of the Swan Queen and must therefore embody both the pure White Swan and the evil Black Swan. Her quest for perfection as a ballet dancer leads her to experience, in her everyday life, the transformation experienced by the White Swan in the ballet's story. The events of Nina's daily life therefore mirror the story of the character she takes on as a ballet dancer, ultimately leading to confusion and, as the line between reality and fiction blurs, to apparent insanity. But in the process, she will have to shed her "sweet girl" persona and embrace her darker side to fully embrace the role and to please her demanding and sexually aggressive director, Thomas. Her metamorphosis is so complete, that Nina eventually develops webbed feet, bird-like legs and sprouts feathers and wings to actually become the black swan.

She sees herself actually turning into the black swan and emerging to a totally different persona. Nina's quest for perfection is entirely focused on technique in terms of body positioning and movement; she doesn't yet truly relate to the emotional experience of dancing and dancing as a sexual being. In order to do that, she must find the dark side of herself, something that is alien to her, as she has been brought up to remain a child, meek and acquiescent, and certainly not to explore too far afield. She needs her dark side, not only to be the black swan, but more importantly to become a mature woman. Nina, who constantly strives for perfection, lives with her controlling mother, Erica, who gave up dance to have her daughter. They live in a tiny New York City apartment, cluttered with her mother's narcissistic paintings. Erica tries desperately to restrain her daughter from living freely and autonomously.

Nina is portrayed as a young, beautiful and sweet ballet dancer, a metaphor for the graceful lines and effortless movement of a white swan. But the production also calls for the lead dancer to transform into the white swan's alter-ego, the black swan. The darker, pleasure-seeking, unrestrained black swan is something the director of the dance company didn't think she could handle. He thought of her as too rigid and frigid to take on the characteristics of a black swan. Nina was branded as one-dimensional. In order for her to successfully take on the role of the black swan, she must change her entire appearance and personality. Nina's ballet director saying, "when I look at you, all I see is the white swan, yes your beautiful, fearful, fragile, ideal casting." (Black Swan) shows that he only sees the innocent side of her when what he also needs is the other side of the black swan, the dark side.

“ If I were only casting for the white swan, I would pick you. But I am not just casting for the white swan” (Black Swan), his perceptions of Nina were firmly lodged. He was not convinced. Nina’s job was to convince the director that she had what it took to transform. In different situations, Nina was able to transform into different personas in order to benefit herself, just as Erving Goffman suggested, everyone is only in it to benefit them. In order to obtain perfection, or in alchemical terms, to accomplish the Great Work, Nina must master both good and evil – light and darkness. The occult concept of duality becomes therefore extremely important. Nina needs to seduce and convince her ballet director that she is capable of becoming the Black Swan. She emerges from the “ little girl” that she once was into seductive young women. Thomas says “ I knew the White Swan wouldn’t be a problem. The real work would be your metamorphosis into her evil twin” (Black Swan) suggests to Nina that she needs to transform herself into some else. Seducing the ballet director was a way to prove to him that she was able to break out of her shell.

As Nina becomes haunted by the Black Swan, this alternate persona takes a life of its own and acts outside of Nina’s conscious control. Goffman perspective argued against the idea that each individual has a “ self”. He believed that our ‘ selves’ changes through behaviour and through different obstacles. Some of the very tense scenes in the movie involve the director interacting with Nina, encouraging her toward self-discovery. He actually serves to counteract some of the mother’s influence by telling her she is strong (as opposed to weak), that she should fight back rather than be so accepting, and to be an adult sexual being, rather than remain a little girl.

While Nina's director is trying to turn her into the 'black swan', her overbearing mother is trying to keep her daughter to be submissive ballet dancer. Half way through the film, Nina refuses to be her puppet any longer, realizing that her mother is actually bitter about Nina's accomplishments. Nina delights in the realization that whereas she has become a star, her mother did not get beyond the corps of ballet. Overt friction between Nina and her mother only becomes apparent when Nina begins to separate. The mother's dismay is captured by the lines, "What happened to my sweet girl?" to which, Nina vehemently replies: "She's gone!!!"(Black Swan). Breaking away from the mother's tight bonds allows Nina to soar and master the Black Swan role. This comes to show that Nina's 'self' changes overtime in order to achieve her goals in life.

The pursuit of perfection, an impossible goal, interferes further with self-development. Her drive for perfection prevents her from getting satisfaction from her accomplishments, a source from which self-esteem is normally derived. Nina is very competitive when it comes to ballet "it's my turn to be the Black Swan!" shows how eager she is not only to be part of the show, but to be the main cast member of the show. The movie suggested that Nina had an identity crisis and in order to please the director, she had to become someone that she was, at first, uncomfortable with. As Goffman proposed, the goal of this presentation of self is acceptance from the audience through carefully conducted performance. If the actor succeeds, the audience will view the actor as he or she wants to be viewed, which is exactly what Nina presented.

In conclusion, Erving Goffman is a sociologist whom adapted the dramaturgical perspective. He used this theory of social interaction to try and explain why we do what we do by means of comparing us to actors in a theatrical presentation. The dramaturgical approach shows us that what we do, we worry about what others will think. Erving argued that the 'self' is not developed as a core but rather developed through our behaviours in different scenarios. In the movie Black Swan, Nina, the main character shows her passion for ballet and goes through drastic measures in order to achieve her goal of getting the role of the Black Swan. Letting go of her innocent, sweet little girl side of her; the White Swan, she indulges into her 'evil twin'; the Black Swan. Not only does this come out through her ballet play but it also comes to show in reality.

Work Cited

Black Swan. Dir. Darren Aronofsky. Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2010. Film.

Sociology of Occupations 342/2 notes by P. Pasdermajian