

# To Be Who I Am: An Issues Case on Identity and the Body

by

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## Part I—Narrative

It wasn't so much that I wanted to be an amputee as much as I just felt like I was not supposed to have my legs. From the earliest days I can remember, as young as three or four years of age, I enjoyed playing around using croquet sticks as crutches. By the time I was seven, I had begun to think, "This is the way I should be."

But it wasn't until my 50s that I actually had my leg amputated. It finally happened when I froze my leg in dry ice until it was so messed up that a surgeon had to finish the job. I remember coming out of the anesthesia, seeing that my left leg was gone, and feeling that all my torment had disappeared.

People ask me, "Why?" Before I had my leg amputated, I looked at other amputees as role models. I saw them coping heroically. I saw myself in that position, too, compensating, even overcompensating, and achieving. As time went on, it was also the attraction of finding new ways to do old tasks, finding new challenges in working things out and perhaps a bit of being able to do things that are not always expected of amputees.



## Part II—Charles Horton Cooley’s Theory of the “Looking-Glass Self”

*“Each to each a looking-glass  
Reflects the other that doth pass.”*

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

“A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification. The comparison with a looking-glass hardly suggests the second element, the imagined judgment, which is quite essential. The thing that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another’s mind. This is evident from the fact that the character and freight of that other, in whose mind we see ourselves, makes all the difference with our feeling. We are ashamed to seem evasive in the presence of a straightforward man, cowardly in the presence of a brave one, gross in the eyes of a refined one, and so on. We always imagine, and in imagining share, the judgments of the other mind. A man will boast to one person of an action—say some sharp transaction in trade—which he would be ashamed to own to another.”

—Excerpted from Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Scribner’s, 1902, pp. 179–185.

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