

# The formation and change of identity

Business



In the minds of many, choices are insignificant factors of daily life. Choices are often overshadowed as people are forced to confront millions of them throughout a lifetime. While it is true many choices, such as what to wear in the morning, are not life changing, many decisions can be monumental. Contradicting the false belief of many, each and every choice involves intricate thoughts and has major effects.

Decisions have the capacity to provide insights about different people. If someone chooses not to complete their homework, the assumption of a lazy person can easily be made. More than just peers learning characteristics about others, decisions can make people learn and develop their own unique qualities. Every choice can help to influence and piece together someone's identity. In the novel, *If I Stay*, by Gayle Forman and outside sources, support groups and choices are used to develop and explore identity.

In *If I Stay* and the article "Maternal Depression and Child Development" by The Canadian Pediatric Society, identity is fashioned by family. Family members have an impact on their offspring. People are around their family more than anybody else. Therefore, personality, hobbies, and interests can be spread and affect children. Cognitive performance is much worse for children with depressed mothers, as "Depressed mothers are less likely to offer contingent stimulation to their infants, and this disrupts their performance on nonsocial learning tasks" (Canadian Pediatric Society 3). In this instance, a family member is leaving a negative impact on their child.

Since the mother is depressed, the child generates struggles with learning. The child's identity is altered as he or she now has less confidence and

depends on others for academic support. To add, without the mother's depression, some of these traits can be avoided, and likely never be developed. Similarly, In *If I Stay*, Mia's parents and their personalities shaped Mia into the person she is. Mia's parents, especially her father, always had a passion for music.

It was not simply a hobby, but a job and a lifestyle, as it was a key component of his entire childhood. His clear devotion to music left a mark on Mia, shaping her identity as a performer. It is almost as if fate brought Mia and music together as she had "wandered over to the cello in music class—it looked almost human to me. It looked like if you played it, it would tell you secrets" (Forman 8). This quote reveals Mia's immediate and strong love for music.

Furthermore, for her to describe the cello as human, it proves how music is so meaningful for her, that it acts as a human. She could connect to it like nobody else, just as her father did. Without her father's constant push for her to pursue music, this piece of Mia's identity could have never been developed. Family can have both a positive or negative effect on others, yet it is clear, as seen in the novel and the article, that family has the capability to mold identity. More than simply family, an example of a support group that can alter identity is friends, as seen in the novel and the article "Friends Influence on Adolescents' Adjustment to School" by Thomas J. Berndt.

People choose friends based upon personalities that they admire. Therefore, these desirable or other traits of friends often spread to others and frame their identity. Some dangerous qualities could be shared too, as adolescents

can be “ influenced by drug-using friends so they start using drugs themselves” (Berndt 1312). Friends strive to be like each other no matter the costs. Here, one person is being negatively impacted by a friend.

Their old identity is quickly changed to rebellious and unhealthy due to their friend’s setbacks. Drugs are a serious concern and topic, so for someone to take on this lethal action because of a friend truly shows the vast influence a friend can have, as a life is being risked to be like someone else. In the novel, Mia’s identity is also changed drastically due to her friends. Mia’s boyfriend, Adam, is a punk star on the rise. Mia is not into that type of music and constantly felt left out at his concerts. Feeling bad about not being able to connect with him, Mia set out to make a change.

On Halloween, Mia wanted to fit in with Adam so she did her makeup with “ thick streaks of black liquid eyeliner that made my eyes look dangerous. White powder that made my skin look pale. Bloodred gashes on my lips. A stick-on nose ring” (Forman 96). Adam’s love for punk transformed Mia’s identity from a perfect, quiet girl, into an enthusiastic rocker. Mia’s change is not only mental; she had fully altered herself to look like a punk fan.

This new side of Mia never left as she always had a little punk in her due to her boyfriend, Adam. Peers and friends can influence identity significantly as seen in the novel and the article. In the novel and the article “ How to Make Decision: The Analytic Hierarchy Process” by Thomas L. Saaty, the choices people make are seen to have an impact on identity. Although decisions are not human, they still can transform and create one’s identity. Simply being

put in a situation, under pressure, to make a crucial decision can develop characteristics and traits that were never obtained before.

Choices are extremely difficult to make and “ One may argue the whole process of decision making is so unstructured and so amorphous that it is no use trying to be precise” (Saaty 1). Since decisions are so unstructured it requires extreme skill, intelligence, and independence to make them. To continue, specifications in the quote like “ it is no use trying to be precise” prove the complex and elongated thought that goes into every decision (Saaty 1). After being forced to use all of these challenging skills, they often become part of one’s identity as they had experience using them.

Furthermore, the novel is similar to this, as Mia is forced to make a decision that shapes her identity as a person.

Mia’s decision is far more difficult than most, it is dealing with whether to live or to die. Mia struggles to take the responsibility on her own as she wants to “ leave things up to the fates, or to the doctors, or whoever decides these matters when the decider is too confused to choose between the elevator and the stairs” (Forman 120). Mia did not have the independence and individual intelligence to make this critical decision on her own. She wanted others to do the hard work for her, so she could stay inside of her comfort zone. However, she soon realized that this decision would make her do the exact opposite as she is “ running the show. Everyone is waiting on me” (Forman 88).

Here, Mia knows that she must make this decision on her own. Since she is put in this difficult situation, she develops new traits such as independence

and strength. This decision shaped her as a person, making her more powerful and self-sufficient than ever before. Phrases from the quote such as “running the show” prove Mia’s understanding, acceptance and willingness to change. This idiom places a burden on Mia’s shoulders, yet she accepts it, developing a new strength that she never had. Decisions force people take on responsibilities, which help to generate qualities and alter identity as seen in the article and the novel.

Identity is established and often tainted due to support groups and choices, which is proven by the novel and many outside sources. Identity makes up all aspects of humans; it is what distinguishes each person from the next. Many components help to contribute to identity, so each person is a blend of the people, experiences, and objects around them. This idea can help to justify the menacing actions and bad people in the world today. A troubled family life, or lack of food, shelter, or support can have a drastic impact on a person’s identity. Being around many tragic events and circumstances can alter their self-esteem and egos.

Without these troubled lifestyles for children, identities could be stripped of negative qualities. They would have no motivations or reasons to devastate others with horrible deeds. Positive people, actions, situations, and events can create improved identities and potentially prevent acts of terrorism. If children get the support they need, they would be better people, and it would save the life of other children out there, just like them.