

The concept of  
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A 2010 nonfiction bestseller *The Other Wes Moore: One name, two fates*, depicts the true story of two namesakes from Baltimore. The two main characters with identical names pursue very different life paths, which are significantly influenced by their background and upbringing. In such a manner, Wes Moore contends that “public servants – the teachers, mentors, and volunteers who work with our youth – are as imperative to our national standing and survival as are our armed forces” (*Plain Talk about Literacy and Learning*, 2017, p. 31). By comparing and contrasting their lives, the author addresses the issues of destiny, exploited opportunities, and life choices and thus provides a profound contemplation upon the concept of identity in American society.

*The other Wes Moore* chronicles the life stories of two African American boys – Wes Moore, The Author, and The Other Wes Moore. The author depicts their life scenarios, which have very much in common, “I was surprised to find just how much we did have in common, aside from our names, and how much our narratives intersected before they faithfully diverged” (Moore, 2010, p. xiii). Both characters “grew up not far from each other but whose path in life differed dramatically” (Strom, 2016, p. 37). Both of them faced racism at some points in their lives. Hence, this is a coming-of-age novel, featuring how these characters with similar backgrounds ended up with very different lives, “One of us is free and has experienced things that he never even to dream about as a kid. The other will spend every day until his death behind bars...” (Moore, 2010, p. xii). As a result, Wes Moore, The Author, is a successful author and a Rhodes Scholar, whereas the Other Wes Moore is a life-sentence prisoner.

The author's father died as a very young man, and his mother worked hard to provide her son with education at a private school. However, the teenage author did not succeed at school. Instead, he kept company with street gangs and even got a warning from the police. The author's mother realized that he had troubles at school and continued to communicate with drug dealers and thieves. He "had forgotten how to act naturally, thinking way too much in each situation and getting tangled in the contradictions between my two worlds" (Moore, 2010, p. 54). Therefore, she decided to send him to a military school. It was a difficult change in the author's life since he had to get used to strict regulations and to live away from home. However, he gradually began to appreciate the benefits of this education and realized that: "the journey I took was never mine alone" (Moore, 2010, p. 171). In other words, he understood that military services provided him with support and reliable friends, and it eventually had a beneficial effect on his subsequent life. The protagonist continued to pursue a military career, having achieved considerable success in politics.

The Other Wes Moore was also raised in Baltimore by a single mother. His father had abandoned the family, and his half-brother Tony was involved in selling drugs. The Other Wes struggled to escape the criminal path. In fact, his brother Tony tried to persuade Wes that his criminal future was not predestined: "If you won't listen, that's on you. You have the potential to do so much more; go so much further" (Moore, 2010, p. 71-72). However, the Other Wes eventually received a life sentence for first-degree murder. In this context, the author asks a range of existential questions: "Who is to blame for this? Tony, the neighborhood, the school system, Wes's friends?" (Moore,

2010, p. 75). Thus, the two characters ended up with very different lives, in spite of very similar backgrounds and circumstances.

Moore raises a range of important issues, in particular, the role of upbringing in a person's life. As a matter of fact, the author's mother had a significant impact on his life, and her efforts to provide him with a decent education made an essential contribution in his development as a child and a teenager. Indeed, the author's mother sincerely believed in his potential, which eventually encouraged his academic progress, since "supportive relationships are critical for the positive development of youth at risk" (Johnston, & Onofre, 2017, p. 130). Meanwhile, the Other Wes's mother gave up and lost hope in her son's future. As a result, this attitude directly influenced his life because "The expectations that others place on us form our expectations of ourselves" (Moore, 2010, p. 126). Instead, Wes's delinquent brother Tony served as a role model for him, and "Wes wanted to be just like Tony. Tony wanted Wes to be nothing like him" (Moore, 2010, p. 72). Thus, a person's family background and upbringing are essential vehicles in his/her life.

The effect of life choices is another significant aspect of the development of both characters. Hence, the author admitted that both Weses had encountered chances that could have drastically changed their lives: "From everything you told me, both of us did some pretty wrong stuff when we were younger. And both of us had second chances" (Moore, 2010, p. 66). At some point, the author managed to abandon the criminal path, whereas the Other Wes failed to escape it. Indeed, the two characters could have easily interchanged their life scenarios because "The chilling truth is that his story <https://assignbuster.com/the-concept-of-identity-in-the-other-wes-moore-by-wes-moore-essay/>

could have been mine. The tragedy is that my story could have been his” (Moore, 2010, p. 180). Hence, learning another person’s history helped the author to comprehend his own life path as “ Learning the details of his story helped me understand my own life and choices...” (Moore, 2010, p. xiii). In such a manner, the author emphasized that a person’s destiny was basically a construct of his/her life choices.

Yet there are two deeper messages in *The other Wes Moore*. The first one is the author’s appeal to parents, youth practitioners, and educators who have a paramount role in a person’s development. The second one is the idea that each person bears responsibility for his/her life choices, and, therefore, it is necessary to carefully consider one’s steps, since “ it’s hard sometimes to distinguish between second chances and last chances” (Moore, 2010, p. 67). Hence, the author of *The Other Wes Moore* extensively contemplates the concept of identity by addressing the American society in general and each person in particular.

Thus, a person’s identity in *The other Wes Moore* is the result of the collective influences from one’s family and mentors, as well as one’s own decisions. That is why the two Weses had such different lives in spite of their similar background and identical names. In other words, a person’s upbringing and life choices eventually constitute his/her identity, which is a key message of Moore’s novel.

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