

Pygmalion. the
identity of eliza how
does it change and is
it for the better?

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



Pygmalion was written by Bernard Shaw in 1914. The play tells the story of a man called Henry Higgins; a professor of phonetics who makes a bet with a friend Colonel Pickering that he can successfully pass off a low-common cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle as a sophisticated lady by teaching her how to speak with an upper class accent and an improvement in etiquette. Eliza Doolittle by chance meets Higgins and grabs the opportunity to better herself. Eliza wants to improve herself so she can be a flower-seller in a shop instead of on the streets.

Eliza manages this after a lot of hard work and she changes in a number of ways. The changes Eliza makes include: learning to speak correctly by Higgins tuition, she learns about personal hygiene, she learns manners from Mrs Higgins; she learns how to dress properly by Mr Higgins, her confidence and self-esteem increases with Mr Higgins behaviour towards her. The ending of the play is ambiguous because although Eliza has changed her identity, she is so unrecognizable to the other street flower sellers that she no longer fits into her old class and society anymore; she is no longer sure of who she actually is.

The first time we meet Eliza is when she is trying to sell flowers to people who are running for shelter from the rain into the porch of St. Paul's church. It becomes apparent that Eliza is a low-common flower girl with her gutter speech. There is a note taker who is taking down what the flower girl is saying, which then leads her to think he is a police officer. At this time the flower girl is the only person who doesn't have a name. The significance of this is that, it's as if she doesn't have an identity, however she does have

some sort of identity with her personality. " Thank you kindly, lady. " I'm a good girl, I am. " This evidence shows how she has a general sense of manners, she treats people well and with consideration, which as the play continues is something that Higgins doesn't have.

Higgins was treating her like she was nothing and he and her father look on her as commodity as Doolittle offers Higgins to pay for her. A change that Liza encounters is her hygiene, in order for Liza to be treated like a lady and receive her lessons; she must wash and dress properly. It soon becomes apparent that Liza is apprehensive about having a bath, one thing Liza rarely does. You expect me to get into that and wet myself all over! Not me I should catch my death". This evidence clearly shows Liza's working class stigma - a disgrace to others around her after finding out she's never had a proper wash before. Liza's appearance also causes a controversy in the way she wears 'rags' all the time, as appearance is an important factor when a change of identity occurs. This is a very positive change in Liza because now she has changed to be a hygienic person and looks like a lady. Throughout, the play when Liza is growing and learning every day, she gets respected more from other people. (Very courteous) won't you sit down? "

This suggests the great respect Pickering pays Liza from the beginning. As a result of Liza's improved treatment from others, it makes her self esteem increase, she gets more confident. The audience will notice Pickering acting like a true gentleman. Liza needs respect during her change in identity, so this is a positive change. After a period of time, Higgins decides to test Liza to see if she has learnt anything of what he has taught her. He takes Liza to

his mother's at-home day. However, after a while Liza suddenly starts to relapse back into her old gutter speech and mind. They done the old woman in" " Gin was mother's milk to her. " This evidence suggests that Liza hasn't actually changed at all. The language she used reminds us of her old cockney flower girl image and that she still reflects on her now.

There is still more work that Liza needs to do in order to be a lady, this reflects badly on her after her hard work to achieve where she was.

Throughout the play, it has been seen that the way Liza is treated by Higgins is rather unpleasant, he puts her under a lot of pressure. He treats her with disrespect and with a certain dislike. Put her in the dustbin" this evidence shows how Higgins doesn't have any respect for the girl, this treatment continues throughout the play. The language used would create the effect that he doesn't like her cares what happens to Liza, it looks like they have a bad relationship, but he's teaching her to stand up to him which could be the greatest of all her identity changes, so this is a positive change to her because he is forcing her to stand up to him but it could also be a unhappy encounter because of the lack of respect at the time.

Liza only originally planned to have the lessons to make her speech better, so she could achieve her dream of becoming a flower-seller in a shop; however more fundamental changes have taken place. " she must be a princess at least" this evidence shows that she has achieve her original goals, but she has also gained some which include confidence from her new voice and appearance; her appearance has changed quite a lot, her posture changes, her manners and respect change and also her hygiene along the

way. So this is a very positive change however, Liza may feel as if she has become two separated from her original plans.

After Liza's hard work and determination she feels she cannot go back to the gutter. " I have forgotten my own language, and I can speak nothing but yours" this evidence suggests how she has lost her old life behind and doesn't want to be part of her old life again. Liza has grown as an independent lady and doesn't want her past to reflect her new life- but this doesn't fit into her new life because she has become so far away, she doesn't know who she really is anymore. This creates an effect on the audience because she is showing she has changed and is not the same person, she used to be.

Liza has shown an external change rather than on the inside because she still reverts back to her gutter speech at certain times. Overall, Liza has changed. She has changed in many different ways which include her new identity which has come along with her improved hygiene, self-esteem/confidence, etiquette, views, goals/ambitions and her relationships such as one which formed with Freddy. Liza has found her self-importance and independence which she can now leave Higgins, without his need all the time, as she leaves with Freddy, which doesn't entirely make her happy.

Liza would have liked to stay with Higgins but he didn't want her. She can't return to her previous life because Higgins has left her unfit for it, example is Liza's father Doolittle, who hates being rich. If anything Liza's transformation

has taken away her identity because she no longer knows who she is; she isn't Doolittle's daughter anymore, no longer a street flower seller and no longer Higgins experiment. She doesn't know what her future holds and doesn't know what she is going to do.