

Identity: through others we become ourselves

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



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Through Others We Become Ourselves Rachel Sealy-Fisher In this essay, I will be discussing how people create identities for others through propaganda and language usage, perceptions and first impressions and how we accept these identities because of fear. I will use the films: Avatar and Memoirs of a Geisha as well as the novel: We Shall Not Weep by Johnny Masilela as references. Everyone creates identities for others. Often this is sub-conscious or unintended. We sometimes create these identities because carefully compiled propaganda and language have been used on us.

From what we hear, we form identities. In the film, Avatar, Colonel Quartich, head of the Avatar programme, tells Jake Sully “ Every living thing that crawls, flies or squats in the mud, wants to kill you and eat your eyes for Jujubes. ” The colonel informs Jake about the dangers on the planet Pandora, accurately portraying his negative feelings about the planet. He creates an identity for the Na’vi, the natives of Pandora, that they are savage beasts, referring to them as “ blue monkeys” or “ roaches”.

He sets this negative identity in Jake’s head before he even meets the Na’vi. Mabena, Duma’s grandfather in Johnny Masilela’s We Shall Not Weep tried to keep Duma enlightened about his Ndebele past and creates a negative identity about westernisation and Duma’s interest in music. Mabena insists that Duma keep the values of his history alive. Duma, however, is disinterested and absorbed in urban life and jazz music. Through this, Mabena creates a negative identity for urbanisation.

Identities are also created by first impressions and perceptions. How we first see someone is often how we will think of that person in the future. In the movie, Avatar, Neytiri, a Na’vi and daughter of Chief Moat, is asked by Jake

why she saved him when a Pandorian creature was attacking him. She says, “ You have a strong heart. No fear. But stupid! Like an ignorant child. ” She tells him this on their first encounter. She instantly gets the impression that Jake has good motives, but is stupid and ignorant.

However, we see Jake isn't as ignorant as Neytiri first makes him out to be, but he has a lust for learning the ways of the Na'vi. The Na'vi have also created an identity for humans, or ‘ Sky People’. They believe they cannot learn how to ‘ see’. Chief Moat says to Neytiri when she asks if she may try to teach Jake to see, “ We have tried to teach other Sky People. It's hard to fill a cup that is already full. ” Moat is implying the ‘ Sky people’ are unwilling to learn that it is difficult to change their reluctance to learn.

Sayuri, a Geisha from the film: *Memoirs of a Geisha* created an identity for the chairman, who she met as a young girl, as a kind, caring and loving man when he stopped to buy her a cup of sweet ice and told her to smile while she was crying. He, in return, has created a beautiful, fragile identity for Sayuri, and falls in love with her, but refrains and tries to protect her instead. These are just examples of how we all create identities for others based on perceptions and first impressions.

Although we may be aware that our identities may be created for us, and often by us, we still choose to accept that this is who we are. We accept the identities that other people have created for us as who we are, rather than creating our own identities and finding our true self. Sakamoto Chiyo in *Memoirs of a Geisha* accepts the idea that she is a worthless slave as she is afraid of what her okiya mistress may do to her if she questions her position. She remains silent, believing she has no voice.

Later, when she becomes Sayuri, she does what others say she must do, such as selling her mizuage to the highest bidder to become a true geisha. She does all this for fear that she may not fulfil her goal and become a true Geisha. In conclusion, we all create identities for other people and ourselves. These may formulate through brainwashing propaganda and language usage, perceptions and first impressions. We often accept these identities because of fear that those around us will not accept us. Many films and novels are written around identity creation.

Avatar, Memoirs of a Geisha and We Shall Not Weep are simply three examples of identity creation and acceptance of these identities as our own rather than creating our true identity, that isn't influenced by others, but purely ourselves. Word count: 765 words Bibliography: Masilela, Johnny. "We Shall not weep" 1 May 2012 [www. Kwela. com/we shall not weep](http://www.kwela.com/we-shall-not-weep) [www. beyondintractibility. org/bi-essay/identity-issues](http://www.beyondintractibility.org/bi-essay/identity-issues) Memoirs of a geisha. IMDB. 2 May 2012 [http://www. imdb. com/title/tt0397535/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0397535/) Films: Avatar Memoirs of a Geisha Novel: We Shall not Weep- Johnny Masilela (June 2002)