

Nature of identity alteration research paper sample

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Identity Alteration

Anyone who has seen Nicholas Cage and John Travolta's 1997 film entitled *Face Off* would be able to relate to the statement that identity alteration of that nature is mind boggling. The film portrays two men—one is a law enforcer and the other is a criminal, trading identities and in the process necessary has to go far to trading off faces. Many would probably say that is insane and no person in their right mind would agree to that because of the risk that it involves. Others would probably have to agree with the Feds' decision to allow one of their best agents to switch places with a criminal for a purpose. However, you have to see the film to be able to determine which side you are on and if the identity alteration was indeed necessary. On the other hand, while different in motives and themes, another fictional story depicts identity alteration. In the case of Dana Spiotta's lead characters in her 2006 fiction novel, *Eat the Document*, Mary Whittaker and Bobby Desotto had to alter their identity and assume to be totally different people in order to protect themselves from a legal accountability. Both stories gives the public the idea of identity alteration from a literary perspective.

Nevertheless, the principle behind altering one's identity is very much real and is not simply a product of an artist's rich imagination. This paper would explore the realm of identity alteration and identify the reason why amidst the risk and the possible implications that it may create, many are drawn to altering their identity.

Society condemns identity alteration for the simple argument that it is a highly unorthodox making it classified as "forbidden." Nevertheless, there

are circumstances that warrant this practice acceptable. These are just among the shortlist exclusions that a society is will to tolerate. These are for reasons of personal security and safety as determined by the criminal legal system. It should be established that identity alteration is considered a criminal offense if it falls under the premise of identity theft (Harrell and Langton). In a study conducted by Harrell and Langton, statistics reveals that there is an approximately 7% of US residents who had been a victim of identity theft in 2012 alone. In another study, it revealed that a certain percentage of people who alters their identity commits fraud when they assume the identity of another individual another deceased or alive.

Reasons For Identity Alteration

The common reason that identity thieves gives are usually related to finances or immigration or to evade legal accountability (Stevens). For example, some would assume to be another person to get access to the other person's personal records like credits cards and even their social security number and take advantage of the privileges that were supposed to be meant for the other person. Other reasons include evading their civil and legal accountability as with the case of the characters from Scott Fitzgerald and Jon Krakauer's novels (Krakauer; Fitzgerald). In the two novels, the characters altered their identity because they were hoping to escape the law after committing a crime.

However, there are some positive cause why people alter their identity. This is eloquently explained by Dana Spiotta. Spiotta's characters—Mary Whittaker and Bobby Desotto, altered their identity because they were trying

to avoid the police after being wrongly accused of a crime they have not committed (Spiotta). While in Greg and Gina Hill's book, they narrated how Mafia children had to assume a different identity to protect them from being the target of their family's enemies (Hill). Similar to the movie Face Off, the good guys decided to switch the face of John Travolta with Nicholas Cage who happens to play the role of a criminal to help them identify the other members of the syndicate where Cage belongs (Woo). In these few rare cases, identity alteration becomes justifiable.

Theorizing Identity Alteration

There are various reasons to what prompt an individual to alter their identity.

These can either be positively-motivated or negatively-motivated.

Nevertheless, the reasons for identity alteration have no implications to what could potentially create for an individual (Kendall). In fact, even if the reason for changing one's identity is for the individual's welfare, no one can be prepared for the psychological impact of having to assume to be a different person. In the case of the Mary Whittaker, the lead character in Spiotta's novel, her decision to alter her identity brought mental and emotional distress. This is similar to the case of the children of Mafia members who felt that they were being boxed up and suppressed.

Several theory had been presented to explain identity alteration and its implication. Two of this theory includes the Dualist Theory and the Bundle Theory. These are two opposing theories that present a good explanation on identity alteration. According to Derek Parfit, people decides to alter their identity and assume another person's in the hope that they can denounce

along with their true identity everything that comes with it including one's mistakes, weaknesses and accountability (Parfit). However, a person cannot exist outside of his mental state. Therefore, assuming a new identity will not change anything contrary to this common misconception that when one assumes a new identity they can already live a new life (The National Network to End Domestic Violence).

However, Richard Swinburne thinks otherwise. Swinburne argues the merits presented in his Dualist Theory. According to this theory, Parfit should never discredit the power of the mind to control the body along with behavior (Swinburne). Hence, altering one's identity would not pose any difficulty unlike what Parfit claims. This is the reason many people have successfully transformed their lives and accomplish whatever intentions they had previously for assuming to be a new person.

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