

Different perspectives of identity construction media essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

What is identity? The online dictionary (<http://dictionary.reference.com>) revealed several meanings to this word. The most relevant definition would be describing identity as the condition of being one self and not another or having a sense of self. However, the definition of identity is much more complex than that. This paper aims to interpret and explore the multitudinous meanings of identities as well as to show different perspectives of identity construction and its relationships to social context. One may realize that identity can never be considered as fixed and stable. Even though while some core parts of our lives remain steady, identity is constantly being changed, enhanced and emphasized through heavy influences of the media. Hence, identity can appear as multiples and is frequently fluid and shifting (Grieshaber and Canella 2001, pg 13) as different individuals having different aspects, change subconsciously when situation calls for it. As a result, identities are performative and they transform according to changes in social context and circumstances. The most reasonable explanation of why identity is crucial is probably because many of us try to fit into identities that are more socially accepted than others as it is the easier "way out". However, choices or pathways get restricted often when there is already an ideal character built that we are pushed to follow. (MacNaughton and Davis 2009)

By addressing this issue of identity, we are also placing importance on language as it also shifts depending on social context (Derrida, 1974, 1967). Just like how some behaviours or identities become "normalized", meanings of words are able to become normative due to discourses. Language allows construction of discourses. In an overview by Elizabeth Adams (2000), she <https://assignbuster.com/different-perspectives-of-identity-construction-media-essay/>

mentioned on how discourses play an essential role in allowing some identities to be confined to socially constructed rules and regularities while disallowing other identities to be “normal”. Discourses are interlinked to histories which give rise to people’s actions and ways of thinking, affecting the ways they act and communicate through language. Discourses are only acceptable to a certain discourse community. When it becomes “natural”, actions and words become “normalized” and therefore make it harder to break dominant discourses (MacNaughton, 2005). Hence, discourses privilege anyone confident that he/she has some sort of ability to gain recognition from others. This intense desire of being socially accepted is the main reason why multiple identities are being performed.

Having a personal identity has never been so focused in today’s society. This can be witnessed from constant display from the media. There are television commercials connecting with a certain identity, technology applications such as Facebook and Twitter to share your social life with netizens. Online diaries and blogs allow anyone to give their comments on issues in society. It is also employed by marketers all the time in advertisements to reduce cognitive dissonance from purchasing their high end designer products. (I often ponder upon what makes one buy a more expensive product just because of the various designer logos when there are products with better functionality out in the market at a more affordable price?) It is all about branding to connect with consumers who construct a personal identity. Buying or gaining material comforts actually reveal insecurities which will be discussed at a greater detail in youth subcultures. There is contradiction however, that in the process of not being “normalized” or appearing as a stigma, a different

identity is being created. This may question people when they are not used to inconsistencies and thereby gaining more recognition. There is constant motivation for one's identity to be reinforced.

Identities exist to be performative and it is shaped by circumstances.

Therefore, it can be said that formation of identities has become a task, created to gain advantages over others in the social world. However, there must also be existence of subjects as one cannot be somebody in the absence of someone. Subjectivities (which are also a form of discourse) allow you to be somebody. Multiple identities allow one to have an advantage over another. Subjectivity of individuals are constructed and produced through various factors such as cultural and social practices. As identities are shaped by circumstances, globalization can also be considered to be a contributing factor in formation of new identities. Due to globalisation, there is emergence of competitive societies giving rise to high expectations from youths of today.

Youths of today face different social issues compared to past generations. This has given rise to many social changes such as demolishing of traditions and waning of institutions. Thus, youths identities are being shaped by circumstances and expressions of global growth culture (White & Wyn, 2008). They face expectations from the previous generation which adds stress and motivate them to break traditions to seek liberty. Failing to meet these expectations would make them feel demoralized and depressed because they feel that they have failed society. This leads to escapism such as suicide and drugs. Youths today are required to make decisions without a template prior to previous generations. Often labelled as responsibilities in <https://assignbuster.com/different-perspectives-of-identity-construction-media-essay/>

which youths have to fulfil, they find it hard to balance and transcend into adulthood. This is explained by Peter Kelly (2006) on forging an identity being similar to entrepreneurship,

“...develop the capacity to conduct themselves, imagine themselves, as being responsible for the maintenance of themselves as an enterprise, in an ongoing, never ending project of self reflection and self actualisation.”

Identity construction has become a project in which youths have to undertake as their decisions in finding sources of income, dealing with school work, engaging in subculture activities and constructing an “ individual” identity have an impact on how they want to be perceived as others. “ Individualisation” has become essential because it provides advantages by opening more opportunities, choices and social circles to associate with. The evolvement of social context means that youths are able to have more possibilities and opportunities for different identities to be created. Identity has thus, become overrated and lost some of its meanings. (White and Wyn, 2008) . Identity has become such a huge part of us that it is often being overused and used as a standard for social status and reputation. As many identities are being performed by youths, it is not unreasonable to say that everyone can be a hypocrite learning to lie as a part of identity shifting. Society probably would not be able to function in the absence of lies.

Education definitely plays a vital role in identity construction as schools try to develop a child’s critical thinking by feeding knowledge. They are a medium for identity production. As quoted by Wexler (White and Wyn,

2008),” The primary tracking in school of a self, and students are not victims but symbolic workers in the identity production process”.

In my opinion, the mass media is probably the most influential factor in identity construction as it is displayed everywhere. Children of all ages watch television programmes and certain programmes are targeted at adolescents. Disney channels, teen dramas and cartoons affect youths from the way they dress to the language that is being spoken (slang used by youths often unknown to adults). There are high action packed Hollywood movies allowing one to have an adrenaline rush, magazines revealing pictures of models with bodies to die for and “ reality” television shows confusing youths what reality is. This is when the confusion of “ fake” becoming a reality. The general audience accept them as the “ truth”. These built-up discourses even make people want to have the ideal identities similar to that of their favourite stars. Therefore, the impact of media is significant as it actually causes a shift in social context. Topics which used to be controversial are becoming somewhat “ normalized” (White & Wyn, 2008). This changes the attitudes of youths and their desires in “ individualising” their identities. In his study of public discourse in media, Neil Postman (1985) stated that,

“...all public discourse increasingly takes the form of entertainment. Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely with protest or even much popular notice. The result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death.”

It is quite a bold statement but there are evidences to support this. Media has elevated the status of superficiality as one would realize that now, only people with camera appeal and good looks are shown on news, dramas and movies. These people may or may not have the expertise but are able to demand healthy salaries for just looking good in front of the cameras. What is portrayed on television and media have unknowingly formed discourses around youth. This is because on television, discourses are formed through visual imagery and therefore, television converse with its audience through images and not words (Neil Postman, 1985). The impacts of these visual images are astonishing and it has a direct effect on identity construction in youths, especially young girls.

Images from television, magazines and even books for young children have made perception of beauty distorted hence showing biasness of whiteness being the universal standard of beauty. Ever noticed that most cosmetic advertisements feature Caucasians? From the consistent presence of white models in media, it indicates that most young girls accept that being “white” as the equivalent of beauty (James Turnbull, 2010). A splendid example of comparison would be of Asian girls undergoing cosmetic surgery to enhance their features. It is appalling how cosmetic surgery is rapidly becoming a social norm in Asia even more so when most surgeries are performed on these Asian girls to give them a more westernized appearance (commonly double eyelids, pointy nose and sharper chins).

While there is no denying that the infiltrations of western cultures have shaped perceptions of beauty, colonialism has also greatly contributed to it.

Due to colonialism in many countries, there is the silent notion of one's skin
<https://assignbuster.com/different-perspectives-of-identity-construction-media-essay/>

colour being connected to decorum and social class. Colonial discourses have produced “ racial distinctions” thereby making “ whiteness” more desirable and evolving it into a discourse (MacNaughton and Davis, 2009). This has subconsciously made young women undergo cosmetic surgery. Although one may argue that the mutilation of face was to provide a more advantageous standing in landing better jobs (Danials Jeffery, 2007), I feel that this is plainly delusional construction of identity, sought by most for social distinction. As mentioned In Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of class distinction, he explained about how one selects his/her social space to the world, depicts one’s status and keeping distances from the lower social classes.

As identity formation is never fixed and always evolving in process, youths would want to express individualism to gain attention which brings us to the following topic on subcultures. Youth subcultures are created to showcase young people’s uniqueness by also showing that they are capable of creating new social norms. By asserting their chosen identity, they are advancing in creating a more fixed identity in preparation for adulthood. Having the right visual identity is constantly being sought by youths as they succumb to pressures of having a desirable body or self image. Apart from cosmetic surgeries, youths choose identities through capital consumerism (White & Wyn, 2008). Designer clothes, accessories and technology gadgets are purchased by youths all in the name of creating identities to fit in with their peers. They aid in the formation of identities. There is intense pressure to conform to groups of majority and wanting to be accepted and that can be observed from various cliques in schools. Marketers have long been aware

how lucrative business could be and have thus made kids and adolescents their target of consumerism. The irony would be that even though youths form identities to fit in, they would still want to be acknowledged as authentic and are not willing to accept in themselves. Pernicious lies and exaggerations are often formulated to try to change their social status and recolour their lives so as to be more popular in their social circles.

In this paper, influences (education, language, colonialism) in identity construction have been explored as well as some of the social problems that youths face in today's society. This paper has also shown a perspective in how media has shaped discourses and significantly played a role in identity formation especially for young girls in the area of proto-feminized-whiteness. In conclusion, identity can be seen as characteristics of an individual that is being influenced by various factors along the way as one constructs according to how he/she is willing to be perceived from others.