

# The different elements of identity



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'At stake are questions about the linkages of different identity domains, how the various aspects of the self interconnect, and how various identities become active or inactive as people locate themselves in various social contexts' (Narváez et al 2009)

Everyone needs to know who he or she is. This is a question about one's identity. Identity is a complicated and debatable term, It is a set of characteristics that belongs uniquely to somebody. It includes both changeable and stable aspects and is influenced by both outside and inside factors. One's identity consists of three basic elements: personal identity, family identity and social identity. Each of these elements is determined by 'individual circumstances' (Wetherell et al 2008).

First of all, personal identity is about one's moral beliefs and self values. It is showed in the decisions one makes, the way they talk to themselves and the different goals they have achieved in their lives (Wetherell et al 2008).

Most people have a standard for right and wrong. People doing the 'right' things would grow honesty and integrity (St Louis 2009). On the other hand, if a person keeps on doing things that they believe to be wrong, they may start to believe they are not to be trusted. These choices will have huge effect on how people consider themselves; this is called 'sense of worth' (Nolan and Rudenstein 2009).

Communicating with themselves, people do 'self-talk' (Narváez et al 2009) most of the time. This self-talk is an important way to build up the sense of how people consider themselves and their self-identity. Each person has

their own standards and values. Each person judges how they are doing according to these criteria (Dyrenfurth 2009).

Moreover, one's successes and failures will also affect personal identity (Dyrenfurth 2009). When people achieve their goals they feel accomplished and fulfilled (Narváez et al 2009). In contrast, if one fails there occurs a 'self-questioning' (Nolan and Rudenstein 2009). Setting and fighting toward goals also makes people meet their limits, which helps find their abilities as well as limitations. This is important for one's 'self-identity' (Narváez et al 2009).

Second element is family identity. It is made up of the characteristics a person has been given along with the role in their family they have been born into (Wetherell et al 2008). Family identity builds up the cultural environment in which people will grow their knowledge of who they are. Scientifically, this is about DNA, which is unique to each and everyone. As well, the 'inherited traits' (Narváez et al 2009) one receives through birth determines both their mental and physical attributes. Some children may be gifted with high intelligence while others may suffer with an emotional, mental, or physical handicap (Crenshaw 1996, cited in Narváez et al 2009). Although these nature born characteristics may have less impact during life experience, they will always have fundamental effects.

The 'bearing on' (Wetherell et al 2008) identity or say the role people are born into in their families has been well explored by many psychiatrists. There are many researches exploring the personal characteristics different roles of the family will have. 'Commonalities of people within each group' (Wetherell et al 2008) can be explained by analyzing children's behaviors in

their families. The 'Firstborns' (Wetherell et al 2008) are known to feel they have the responsibility to be the one to set an example in their family (Zylinska 2005, cited in St Louis 2009). While the youngest child of the family are often considered spoiled and not have to fight for as many rights as their older siblings. (St Louis 2009). Though these generalizations may vary in different families, they still impact on one's identity throughout life.

Culturally family leads to the way of life one will go. Women and men have always considered having different roles in life (St Louis 009). This is determined in both gender roles and ethnic groups. For example, men are often taught to be the ones to earn money and in contrast, women are to be the homemakers. Men are natural to be tough and unemotional while women are caring and sensitive (Wetherell et al 2008). On ethnic stage, education is one of the most significant aspects in some cultures, while athletic ability or beauty is more important for others (Duany 2003, cited in Nolan and Rubenstein 2009). These are all cultural influences one would receive to build up their sense of identity.

'... the question, and the theorization, of identity is a matter of considerable political significance, and is only likely to be advanced when both the necessity and the 'impossibility' of identities, and the suturing of the psychic and the discursive in their constitution, are fully and unambiguously acknowledged'(Hall 1996, cited in St Louis 2009).

Finally, social identity is about one's world around them. It includes what one believes others feel about them and how one believes they fit within their society (Wetherell et al 2008). It is largely influenced by factors such as

one's working class, monetary value, education level, and popularity (Dyrenfurth 2009).

Owning a company compared to working at the bottom floor of a company creates a different sense of power and security (Nolan and Rubenstein 2009). Positions in employment can impact on the community one lives in and the respect they receive. This is how it impacts on the power and respect one believes they have (Nolan and Rubenstein 2009). This also affected by monetary conditions, as people with wealth are often given the same power and respect in society. A well-dressed person will be more intently listened to in public than one who is poor and in broken clothes. This will transfer over to the sense of worth people feel they have (Dyrenfurth 2009).

Moreover, the level of education one experiences effects the belief of one's ability. Society as a whole enforces the separation (Wetherell et al 2008). Many community and business positions require a formal education record without giving exploration to the experiential background of candidates. This may cause one to believe they are more or less equipped, brighter or slower depending on the level of education received (St Louis 2009).

Last but not least, one's popularity in society is among the greatest influences upon social-identity. To be popular or not is determined by many aspects. One can hold or lose popularity by showing their charm, good will, humor, intelligence, power, social standing, wealth, beauty and so on. Being liked or not is based on these qualities, which may highly likely cause one to re-evaluate the qualities they believe they have and their self value and self-

identity (Narváez et al 2009). People's feel of their self-identity will change during their social experiences.

In conclusion, with such individuality and uniqueness, it is without a doubt to say identity is complex, but it is also simple to see aspects from where self-identity is gained. Self-identity shifts throughout life with influences of family, personal, and social factors. In the end, one's identity is built up of a set of characteristics that one finds are uniquely belong to oneself.