

# Which social processes are more important in shaping individual identity

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Individual identity could be described, as basically what any given individual perceives of them self. This perception covers everything; from personal attributes to where one stands in broader connotations such as the workplace or political groups. In sociology and psychology it is also known as self-concept (Beyers & Goossens, 2008). As much as this identity or self-concept consists of many things, it is formed and shaped by many differing things in our life.

It can be broken down and examined in all its facets: cultural and ethnic identity, national and political identity, religious and collective identities, gender identity, career identity. Individual identity is the sum of the individuals' knowledge and understanding of these facets - how they fit all the pieces together (Grotevant, 1997). This depends on what has been important to that individual; which shaping element had the most influence on them at different developmental stages in their life and how many aspects of their life were influenced.

From the moment one is born one is bombarded with information - not only practical knowledge such as talking and reading but also social knowledge, enabling us to function and relate effectively and normally in society. This social information is passed to us differently than most knowledge. Most knowledge is actively taught to us; social knowledge is a combination of implicit and explicit rules moving in constant flux. We receive this information from several sources; social structures such as education systems and workplaces, culture and socialization from family and friends.

When and how we receive this information is unique to each person and these social processes can be very important and powerful in shaping <https://assignbuster.com/which-social-processes-are-more-important-in-shaping-individual-identity/>

identity. Social structures are what are sometimes referred to as the framework of human society. They are, in general, common to all societies in their need or function, if not in their nuances. They are our collective and initially unconscious responses to the human condition. Every society has a currency system for the buying and selling of goods, every society has an education system for the teaching of youth, and every country has a system for the implementation and maintenance of laws.

They are the patterns of predictable behaviours and actions (Plummer, 2010). These patterns are repeated and eventually become unique societal answers to common human problems. These structures give one the range of acceptable actions in ones own society. For example, in western society (this term used loosely) when someone is sick or hurt, the acceptable action is to obtain treatment from the medical system. In other countries or societies different actions are deemed acceptable, like intervention or treatment by a religious figure. Social structures are part of the broader environment rather than the immediate environment.

They have influence over the quality or type of education and healthcare one receives, or the availability and security of work, or the type of legal processes used. Often it is not until the individual has the capacity or interest to consciously take note of the broader environment that these social structures influence the individual in an active way (Plummer, 2010). This means that for most, during childhood and even early adulthood, social structures as a social process, if not reinforced by the individuals immediate environment, are having a limited influence on identity.

Culture could be explained as the smaller, more specific details that make the social structures in one society differ from that of another. Culture covers language use, visual keys, and sets the norms for the groups' desires, values and beliefs, and is a learned process, through mainly implicit rules (Back et al, 2012). The primary source of cultural education comes from those closest around, usually parents and extended family. Because of this, the more private ethnic and religious cultures tend to be the first one is exposed to.

These are learned from a very early age, usually with much repetition, ensuring an enduring knowledge base. This traditional knowledge is rarely examined or re-evaluated by the individual until adulthood, often sustaining lifelong practices of culture (Beyers & Goossens, 2008). The next sources of cultural education, as one looks beyond family, are peers and the immediate community. Often the at hand youth culture, or other sub-cultures the individual may be attracted to through interests, for example rock climbing.

Some individuals, especially during teen years, whom are not receiving needed emotional support from other sources, can become extremely attached to these sub-cultures. In these cases adherence to the sub-culture can be long lasting and powerful, having a weighty influence on identity (Grotevant, 1997). Due to the early exposure to culture and the immediate influence it has on the individual, culture can be play an important role in shaping identity, however the often private nature of these cultures could have a diminishing effect on just how important.

Socialisation is also learned through mainly implicit rules, and through many institutions. Socialisation occurs through our interaction with others, therefore, particularly in our early years, every person the individual  
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interacts with is contributing to their socialisation (Back et al, 2012). This means that socialisation is a continuous process. Socialisation is learning what is appropriate and not in any given situation with within any social hierarchy. How the individual perceives others and their interpretations of others perceptions of themselves are all tools of socialisation (Hopkins, 2011).

Again, due to early exposure and the immediate influence on the individual, socialisation can be seen to be important. Add to this the wide range of sources of socialisation, the deep implicit knowledge and the mutability of the process, and socialisation would most likely have the most important role in shaping identity. In conclusion, individual identity is a complex, many faceted concept. The formation of this identity is, if possible, even more complex and more individual to each person than the identity itself (Hopkins, 2011).

There are several social processes that assist with the shaping of this identity. Social structures, culture and socialisation are some of these processes. Social structures serve the same function and purpose in each society - providing answers and procedures for common aspects of human life. These broader influences most probably have a less powerful effect on shaping identity. Culture differs from each society and differs again according to the sub-cultures individuals may find themselves identifying with.

Despite early exposure to culture and the immediate influence on the individual, the privacy of culture could reduce the overall importance it has in shaping individual identity. Socialisation is our interpretation of others  
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perceptions of us, of behaviours, of who and what is deemed acceptable. It is in constant flux, being tailored and re-examined almost constantly, if not consciously. The use of language, implicit knowledge derived from so many sources and the day-to-day enforcement yet flexibility of socialisation, makes it the most important social process in shaping individual identity.