

Evaluate the claim
that personal identity
is self-defined



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Evaluate the claim that personal identity is self-defined In order to evaluate the statement, this piece of work will identify what defines a person identity, what conflicts in life can alter our identity, theories on identification and then a look into a person's ethnicity and how this defines and alters a person's identity. The public are consistently being requested to complete forms that try and put our identities into a box for statistical purposes, for example, nationality, race, gender and marital status (Clarke, 2009). Are they trying to identify us as individuals or label us with identities we don't necessarily agree with and take away our ability to self-define our identity? Psychologist Erik Erikson defines identity as ' a sense of continuity over time as a being or entity that is different from others' (Clarke, 2009, Pg252). We all have our own identities that are different than the person stood next to us, but he believed that it doesn't stay the same identity throughout a person's lifetime. We all go through different stages during our lifetime; babies, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and then to old age — Each forging a new identity for us not only based on past experiences but on conflicts and experiences that challenge us in everyday life and the future. In everyday life, conflicts dictate the identity we hold and portray, such as the relationships, ageing, habits and practices which can all profoundly affect our identity. As we get older our body ages and our identity alters, this is something that we have no control over. Although, some people actually choose to change their appearance and therefore identity, by cosmetic surgery, changing their physique through exercise or simply changing your hair colour (Clarke, 2009). The clothes you choose to wear can define your identity, or at least the identity you want to portray to others. The past times people choose, for instance, the music they listen to and their leisure

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activities can often say a lot about person's identity (' Changing Identities', 2009, track 3). Our relationship conflicts can modify our identity when we have to make new friends, change job roles or move to another part of the country/world. Identities differ to different people, dependant on what capacity we appear in their lives, especially to our friends, family and work colleagues. To our colleagues, we are professional. To our friends, we are funny and reliable. To our parents, we are their precious daughter/son etc. Our identity could be perceived as something we define ourselves by the lifestyle we choose to lead, the music we listen to, the clothes we wear and the role we take in work and our family life. Our identity also modifies dependant on the situation a person finds themselves in or the people they are interacting with at that particular time. But there are certain aspects of our identity we can't control, such as, our race, our gender (although some people can choose to change this) and ageing. Our identities can be presumed and prejudices can form, as shown through racial profiling for stop and search purposes both by police on the streets and airport workers in customs. Roles within the household can alter identities, and this can be shown, for example, when the coal industry deteriorated in Wales, many of the men lost their jobs resulting in many of the women, who had been housewives, having to go out and find work. This role change dented the masculine identity as being the provider. As this practice of the woman going out to work and being the breadwinner becomes more embedded, it becomes habit that they have taken on this role and this then becomes their new identity. In order to look further into how people's identities change, the government funded a social science empirical research programme, which looked into a group of women entering motherhood. This subject matter was <https://assignbuster.com/evaluate-the-claim-that-personal-identity-is-self-defined/>

deemed to be suitable as becoming a mother, especially for the first time is, 'life-changing' (Clarke, 2009, P260) All participants lived within the same area in London which was known to have parts that were poverty stricken, but all the women varied in regards to age, race, class, living situation, ethnicity and marital status. The statistical data was gathered via qualitative methods from observational research and interviews both before and after the babies were born. The information will be vital to understand how identities change, as motherhood is a substantial change in a woman's life, seeing all habits, practices and relationships changing dramatically within the blink of an eye. They form identification with their own parents as they are now parents themselves. Their relationships with several people will alter; their relative and friends will see them in a different light as their new identity has formed. Practices and habits when a woman becomes a mother for the first time will change dramatically as they now have someone who is 100% reliant on them. There are a lot of positives to this form of research into identity change and therefore whether we define our own identities, especially as such a wide and varied range of different mothers were used. But, it could also be the case that the way of collating the information could be flawed as a lot of observational and questioning methods of gathering data will be open to interpretation by the interviewer/analyst. It is also not a natural situation, and people may adapt the way they would normally behave and provide the answers to questions with only what they think would be the correct way and what the observer/interviewer is seeking. As a result of this, the data collected is never going to be an accurate record, but this is something that would be difficult to change. As we move through life, there are times when we identify ourselves with other people and can

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empathise with them and their life situation. For example, when a woman gives birth she is able to relate to the feelings felt by fellow mothers and even their own mother when they first held their child. This is called identification (Clarke, 2009) The colour of a person's skin can define their identity and judgement can be placed upon them before they have even opened their mouths and the colour of a person's skin is a part of an identity that is impossible to change. The judgement is not purely on appearance alone, but is through ' dominant social meanings and power relations' (Hollway, 2009. Pg. 277). As social theorist Frantz Fanon proved when he came to Europe from the Caribbean, his identity as a black man was ' inescapable' and ' overriding' (Hollway, 2009 Pg. 278). Fanon stated that it wasn't really about the actual colour of his skin, but the history behind his race that will follow him around and will always define their identities. Negative experiences can also influence the identity you portray, but going back to the empirical study on identity, there was an instance where a black teenager changed his behaviour to fit in with what he believed the interviewer would have a perceived stereotype of. Hence, he is proving a point made by Fanon that ' it isn't the biology of skin colour that is the cause; it is the social meanings built up historically that have effects on black identity' (Holloway, 2009, Pg. 285). The black teenager was re-enacting the conflict against identity he faced everyday due to the colour of his skin. Being a migrant in the UK can make it difficult to forge an identity for yourself, as you are seen as neither one nationality nor the other. A way people manage this conflict is by sharing links with their home country, this is described by the term ' diaspora' (Raghurum, 2009). People can then self-define which identity they wish to take on in certain situations. To conclude <https://assignbuster.com/evaluate-the-claim-that-personal-identity-is-self-defined/>

the evaluation of this claim, personal identity is self-defined, it would be reasonable to state that we do have the ability to self-define our identity which we often have to alter due to the ever changing world that we live in. But there are something's that our out of our control and that can define our identity for us, such as race and age. These are things we can't change, have no control over and are judged on face value by others.