

# [Effect of cultural and racial identity on self-image](https://assignbuster.com/effect-of-cultural-and-racial-identity-on-self-image/)

Many factors contribute to making up the identity of an individual, their self-image and how they portray themselves. Some of these factors include: beliefs, culture, gender, race, amongst others. Usually, people in a society tend to base their initial knowledge of other people on stereotypical generalizations that originate from these various aspects of identity. In many cases, these generalizations that hastily become the known myths do not necessarily tell the truth about a certain group of people with major similarities like cultural background or race. This ends up creating a standard that society indirectly confers on these people who in return, may or may not conform to these standards. Personally, I fall under the category of people that do not live according to what may seem like societal standards when analyzing the average Canadian teenager. My cultural and racial identity sum up the major aspects that influence my self-image because my physical characteristics causes society to not see beyond my cultural background, gender and values.

As an illustration, my cultural and racial background is physically evident because I have distinct features like my skin colour, that show I am Black. Also, when I talk my accent clearly depicts that I am a West-African, more specifically a proud Nigerian girl. This impacts my self-image tremendously because it serves as a constant reminder of my place of origin. Being a true Nigerian child comes with the training I get to enable me become a responsible lady in the nearest future. This is because I have certain responsibilities and standards to live by as a result of my upbringing as a child. For example, in my childhood the importance of working hard was constantly preached by my parents, elders at church, school and even my surroundings. House chores were seen as the primary duties of the children in the home and being the youngest of five did not really help this fact. My place in the family as the last born put me in the position of the errand person. My older ones were more like my supervisors and to them, having me assist whenever there was a need to wash clothes, cook, sweep the house and many more, made me more responsible as I grew older. Up until this point, this makes me see myself as an active role player in my life and maturation process. On the other hand, this is different from how the people around me would judge me. A recent example is when I moved into residence at York University. Being evidently African, a fellow student living on the same floor admitted she thought I would be really “ ratchet”. By this, she meant her expectations of me were low. She thought I was the loud party girl that every guy knew and had sexual history with. She was surprised to find out I am actually a reserved and simple girl who is academic oriented. Her reason for thinking this way came from her encounters with few other Black girls in the past who did not act responsibly because of their issues with drugs, smoking and boys. This made her judge me before she even got to know me for who I truly am.

Secondly, being a girl influences my self-image because it is one physical aspect of my identity that speaks for me before I do. As a female child born into a patriarchal society like that of the Nigerian society, your ideal stages in life have practically been laid out for you to follow. It starts from growing up being responsible and hardworking, then working hard to make sure you are academically successful because education is very important. After this, you get your career and at the “ right time”, get married when your destined husband finds you. For instance, when I was a younger child growing up, my mum always told me stories of how being a good mother or wife is not easy, but worth it. She would always encourage me to watch her whenever she was cooking, serving my dad his food or arranging the house. She constantly emphasized on the importance of being industrious as a lady and potential wife. This means that as a female in the average Nigerian home, your purpose in life seems incomplete if you do not plan on getting married and having children. In other words, after you reach a certain age as a girl, you better start expecting the whole talk about marriage, having grandchildren for your parents and being a good wife, cook and mother when you marry. I do not have a problem with this in any way because I believe that part of the fulfillment of a woman comes from her marrying her true love, having a family and raising her children at some point in her life.

Furthermore, my values which are a major component of my identity determine the kind of person I choose to be and eventually become. My main values include, my belief in Jesus Christ as my saviour, abstinence from sex, alcohol and any type of drugs. This makes me see myself as a misfit because I can hardly fit into my environment or society without having to change or compromise my beliefs a little. Most times, people see me as weird and find it hard to believe that I have never gone clubbing, smoked or at least done something “ cool”. An occurrence that I do not think I will ever forget was in the summer of grade eleven which is about two years ago. I met a guy who happened to be a friend of my close friend. The three of us spent time together at the mall while the guy was trying to get to know me better by asking me questions about my school, background amongst others. I thought he was a nice person. Eventually, he asked if we could “ chill” and I was not sure of what he meant. Regardless, I said no because and gave an excuse of having to go pick my nephew up from school. In all honesty, I did not feel like going out with a guy, especially someone I just met for the first time. To cut the long story short, he ended up walking halfway home with me because he claimed he lived in the same neighbourhood as me. Later on, I figured that by “ chill” he meant he was sexually attracted to me and he just wanted to get something from me because he thought I was that type of girl. I could see disappointment written all over his face when I totally refused his advancements towards me. He said he had never been refused by any girl with a similar racial or cultural background as me. To say the least, I was disgusted at the fact that someone of the opposite gender would actually disregard my belief in sexual purity and abstinence then, judge me in such a disrespectful manner because of my skin color and cultural background.

All in all, I believe that my body goes beyond my physical beauty and what I look like. It encompasses everything about me, ranging from the smallest to the biggest. The way I see myself is also as a result of a combinations of all these factors like how other people see me and judge me. I cannot blame society for their judgements of me, but I can expect better because a person goes beyond his or her cover which is the body. You have to remove the cover in this sense and see every single thing is contains beneath it. As a result of this self-image continuously develops as a person grows and this is my story. I know that despite what my cultural and racial identity entails, I will continuously amaze myself with personal growth and maturity. I will reach beyond the set boundaries and expectations.