

Olive Course, UEL

Identity and Society

Cigdem Esin
May, 2017

Introductory discussion

When you introduce yourself to someone you don't know what is the first thing you tell them about yourself (after your name)?

What is social identity?

Social identity relates to the parts of our identity which we define in our interaction with other people.

Where we place ourselves in society in relation to

Where we are from

Our political belonging

Our relationships (families, friends)

Vocation (doctor, lecturer, driver)

There are multiple ways in which we define ourselves.

Social Categories and Identity

Social identity is shaped by social categories such as

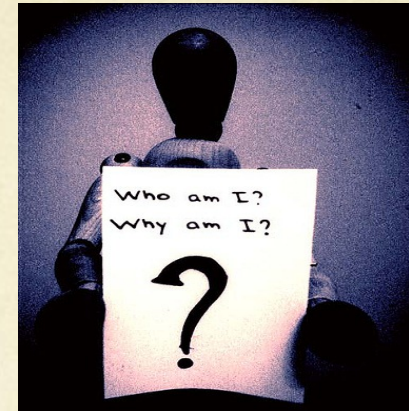


- ‘race’, ethnicity, gender and social class to name a few; the notion of difference is the locus of all these categories (Clarke, 2008)
- Where we place ourself in society, how we interact with other people reflect our place in connection with the categories above.

The self-identity in late modernity

1. The self-identity is a reflexive project:

- ‘We are, not who we are, but what we make of ourselves’ and ‘what an individual becomes is dependent on the reconstructive endeavours in which she or he engages’;
- “self-understanding” is a process of building and rebuilding a coherent and rewarding sense of identity (Giddens, 1991 (2008), 75 –Modernity and self-identity).



2. The self forms a **trajectory of development** from the past to the anticipated future –based on the idea of constant change

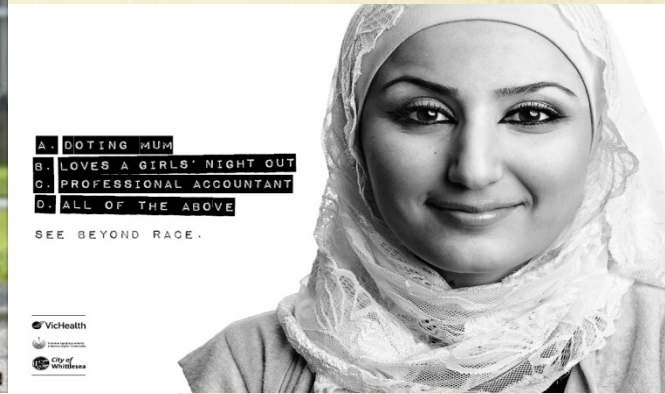
While examining Identity, we need to ask

- How individuals do or do not fit into the dominant social categories (i.e. white, middle-class, male and able-bodied in Western societies)
- The processes of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' by marking the insiders and outsiders, 'us' and 'them' in relation to the dominant social categories
- Identities are defined through our agreement, disagreement or negotiation with other people over our place within these categories

Othering and identity formation

- Othering is process of differentiation and demarcation that draw a line between 'us' and 'them' - between less powerful and more powerful (Lister, 2004)
- A process in which a group with a capacity to dominate define another group as 'inferior', associate this group with stereotypes (For example, black people are not civilised, women are not intellectually capable)
- Historical processes of systematic othering such as Eurocentricism, Xenophobia, Islamophobia
- Our sense of belonging to 'dominant' and/or 'inferior' groups is an important part of our identity.

Examples of othering



Black Crime =Gang Violence.
Arab Crime = Terrorism.
Hispanic Crime = Illegal immigration.
White Crime = No crime, he was just insane.

← Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite ⋮ More

780
RETWEETS

192
FAVORITES



Belonging

- Identity is about belonging –what you have common with some people – what differentiates you from others (Weeks, 1990)
- Who belongs or allowed to claim belonging to a particular community is linked to issues of power and inequality (i.e. gender, racial, ethnic, educational)



Politics of belonging and immigrant identities

- **Belonging** is a process that define who is native and who is migrant. Who makes this decision? It's a form of 'othering'
- Hierarchy of belonging - **who belongs more? Who are deserving** - immigration histories, class, ethnicity, gender
- For example, Target population for industrialised countries to recruit - **skilled migrants**, who will enter the labour market shortly after their arrival - they are the deserving migrants
- Skilled migrants - who have the aspiration of a better life, pre-migration resources, cultural capital and skills to integrate into the countries of settlement
- 'Why are white people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?'
<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/mar/13/white-people-expats-immigrants-migration>

Social class, belonging, identity

- We should examine multiple identity categories in order to understand how these categories come together to form identity
- The formation of an immigrant person's social class is related to experiences of gender, ethnicity, race, the settling status (refugee, skilled migrant, temporary or permanent, EU or non-EU), in the UK (see Fathi, 2011)
- **For example:** For an immigrant, being a medical doctor in their non-Western (sending) country is different from being a medical doctor in the UK for many interconnected reasons such as social status, meanings attributed to being an immigrant + doctor, positioning of that individual in multiple social networks and their gender

While studying identity, we need to remember that

- Identities are never unified in late modern times, they are fragmented and fractured, they are constructed across different, intersecting discourses, practices and positions. (Hall, 1996)
- They are in a process of constant change and transformation (Hall, 1996)