

This essay will discuss the factors that affect the formation of identity from birth to adolescence whilst considering identity theories. This paper will also touch on the influences that affect identity construction, such as parents, gender, culture, adverse childhood experiences, education, and social media.

In brief, identity describes who you are and includes several factors (Eaude, 2019). These factors are continuously changing, especially with technology, freedom of movement and reduction in communication (Koteskey, Walker and Johnson, 1990). Leve (2011) suggests that identity is the term used to indicate how well we know ourselves, although it has been argued that our identities can be adjusted according to who we are with, meaning that our sense of self changes with each interaction (McLeod, 2019). Identity can also be used to describe specific characteristics, or it can combine everything about the person, from the physical features, to personality and values. Although it is likely that every person will be similar in certain ways, each person is entirely unique (Sharma, 2014).

Under Article 8 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, Unicef, 2021), every child is protected in their right to an identity. Under this definition, identity includes a child's name, their nationality, and familial relationships, however, as identity is more than just those things, the majority of the Articles protect different aspects of identity, including non-discrimination, freedom of belief and religion, and a right to education.

Education has long been used as tool to deliver knowledge and gauge intelligence, optimizing global citizenship (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2019). Unfortunately, education could also be hindering identity development as in some areas the curriculum is outdated, in others there is no common curriculum, meaning that each individual country (in some cases different areas of the same country), teach the children what they feel is suitable, thus creating a social identity in each nation (Mishler, 1978). However, Biesta (2015) argues that it is not only the content of the curriculum that is important, but also the teachers that deliver the information.

Bronfenbrenner's theory of Ecological Systems highlights the influence of different relationships and factors of life that could effect child development, whether through direct or indirect contact (Gray and MacBlain, 2015). These systems also emphasize the vast variety of external influences that each individual is subjected to, from parents to wider

culture. Thus, meaning that the individual identity is so much more than just who one is physically (Christensen, 2016) and although this theory details factors of influence, it would be wrong to assume that children without one or more of these external factors would be lacking in development and identity (Guy-Evans, 2020).

Initially, parents are the main source of influence in child development and therefore directly affect identity, from birth introducing the child to a predetermined set of societal values and beliefs (Stets and Serpe, 2013). In some cases, children or adolescents are subjected to adverse childhood experiences (ACES), such as trauma or abuse, these individuals would be at risk of delayed identity development (Wave Trust, no date).

According to Shonkoff et al, cited on NSPCC, (2020), if children are exposed to ACES during certain developmental stages, including adolescence, their brains are more impressionable, meaning the distress they have suffered would likely cause lifelong issues. The way in which children or teenagers choose to deal with this could result in acting out, isolating themselves, missing school or even substance misuse (Smith, 2018).

Parents often initiate gender roles (Carter, 2014) with Younger, Carver and Perry (2004) suggesting that children are able to identify which gender group they are in by the time they reach preschool. The notion of gender only exacerbates stereotyping with Carter (2014) implying that gender is a social construct and therefore the view associated with either gender differs between each person, depending on the way in which they have been socialised. Narrative identity is also partly to blame for this as many stories or roles are linked with certain genders and this therefore encourages continued categorising (McLean, 2009). Likewise, gender identities are magnified in certain religions or cultural groups, for example, in some religions, girls and women are not allowed to pray in the same place as the boys and men, in certain cultures, boys are removed from school early to start work with their fathers and the girls to prevent them learning anything deemed inappropriate (Welsh Government, 2018). In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of children who have deemed themselves as gender neutral or non-binary, they do not feel it necessary to identify as either boys or girls, this has not only seen changes for families but cultures too (Cassidy, 2016).

Culture, a group that is composed of people with the same or similar values and beliefs (Sharma, 2014) is another important aspect of a person's character, however this means

being linked to social identity. Social identity describes the way people see others as a part of a wider group, for example ethnicity, religion, gender, or socio-economic status (Tajfel, Turner, Austin & Worchel, 1979). Although many individuals are proud of their culture and heritage, it has been argued that the focus on social identity can cause its own issues highlighting differences, perhaps in the form of racism or discrimination (Perozzo, 2016). This can lead to anxiety, self-hate and a sense of not belonging, considering children look to their peers for approval (Golshirazian, Dhillon, Maltz, Payne and Rabow, 2015). This may be the case of children that come from families of poorer socio-economic status or poverty, who are often ashamed of this association and are stigmatised for something that is out of their control (Hudson, 2015) often trying to hide it.

Stryker's identity theory (cited in Stryker and Burke, 2000) describes the role or identity that one chooses for each interaction, based on a salience hierarchy of identities. This could mean that the individual portrays the version of themselves that is most appropriate for the situation, for example being quiet and studious when in school and loud and daring when with their friends. Tajfel (1962) claims that children and adolescents feel a need to do this in order to maintain a positive identity, in turn increasing self-appraisal.

In recent years, technology has provided children and adolescents the opportunity to explore their interests at the push of a button, with social media offering a platform for expression (Gunduz, 2017) without leaving their home. Social Media allows for the individual to choose how they wish to be portrayed, in some cases producing entirely different identities to their own (Kasperuniene and Zydziunaite, 2019). This is not all positive however, as some children or adolescents are subjected to cyber bullying, with many concerned about pressures of fitting in with their peers (Purves, Stead and Eadie, 2018). Children and adolescents are now spending more time than ever scrolling through social media, in many cases causing sleep deprivation, poor mental health and reduction in academic attainment (Scott, Biello and Woods, 2019). Allen (2019) concurred suggesting that adolescents with the most time spent on social media, had the highest rates of loneliness. This platform has also provided a new type of role model known as influencers, who children and adolescents watch, virtually follow, and aspire to be like, which often magnifies issues and initiates comparisons (BBC, no date). However, some children use

social media as a form of escapism, leaving their own uncertainties behind and living through the life of others (Muller, Stanoevska-Slabeva and Meckel, 2017).

Overall, social media allows people to connect with others, including people they may never have the chance to meet otherwise. Social media inspires people to come together for common causes, regardless of culture, religion or other factors that may usually hinder relationships, encouraging communication and expression (O’Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson and Council on Communications and Media, 2011).

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020), detail adolescence as people between the ages of ten and nineteen. Contrary to this, research suggests that adolescence is normally reached by teenage years, but that age should not be the only measure as it can depend on other developmental factors such as puberty and brain development, depending on culture (Hazen, Schlozman and Beresin, 2008). When children reach adolescence, Schachter and Ventura (2008) argue that individuals step away from the comfort of being told who they are by their parents and want to form their own identity. This independence could be heavily influenced by external factors, such as social media.

Unlike Piaget’s cognitive development theory, which suggests that a child can reach formal operational thought any time after they are eleven (Piaget, cited in Arthur and Peterson, 2012), Erikson focuses more on psychosocial stages throughout life known as crises (Conn, 1977). Erikson believes that between the ages of twelve and eighteen, an individual will come to a crisis known as identity versus role confusion. This can be explained as the adolescent facing the predicament of deciding if they are happy to continue as they are or if they want to explore other versions of themselves, taking into consideration aspects of their identity such as culture, gender, and sexuality, ultimately reviewing their identity. These psychosocial crises are important stages, whether positive or negative for identity development as they are stages that each person will need to work through or explore in order to know themselves better.

Similar to Erikson’s stages of crises, Marcia (1966) suggests that there are four ways in which an adolescent continues their ongoing identity development. Moving away from childhood and into teenage years, this growth potentially affects their agency and attitude when they reach adulthood. These stages are diffusion, moratorium, foreclosure and achievement,

each detailing levels of crisis and commitment. Only once achievement has been reached, do the individuals feel they have a full sense of self.

Research suggests that parental involvement can have a direct impact on the agency of the child (Berzonsky, 2004). Parents enabling children to explore their identity's mean the adolescent will likely reach identity achievement before others who have less support (Kroger, Martinussen and Marcia, 2010). However, Berzonsky (2004) also argues that parents or caregivers can have a negative impact on children or adolescents if they are disinterested or too heavy in their approach, each child or adolescent is different and will therefore need a different approach.

As a whole, children's identities are shaped by their everyday lives, with each interaction or situation that occurs. By building children's knowledge at home and within a school setting, parents and educators are providing the foundation for which children can shape their identities. With the influence of their values and beliefs, their culture will also be heavily relied upon to guide them. As they grow older, into adolescent-hood, the realisation of peer pressure, along with the take-over of social media will heavily influences their hierarchy of identities. They will come to an identity crisis and it is how parents or caregivers support them through that stage, that will determine how they proceed into adulthood.

Allen, S (2019) 'Social Media's Growing Impact on our Lives', *American Psychological Association*. Available at: [Social media's growing impact on our lives \(apa.org\)](https://www.apa.org/press-releases/social-media-impact) (accessed: 18th January 2021).

Arthur, J. and Peterson, A (2012) *The Routledge Companion to Education*. Oxon: Routledge

BBC (no date) 'The Complicated Truth about Social Media and Body Image'. *BBC Future*. Available at: [The complicated truth about social media and body image - BBC Future](https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190521-the-complicated-truth-about-social-media-and-body-image) (accessed: 18th January 2021).

Berzonsky, M.D (2004) 'Identity Style, Parental Authority, and Identity Commitment', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 33(3), pp. 213-220. Available at: [Identity Style, Parental Authority, and Identity Commitment | SpringerLink \(uwtsd.ac.uk\)](https://www.springerlink.com/identity-style-parental-authority-and-identity-commitment) (accessed 18th January 2021).

Biesta, G (2015) 'What is Education For? On Good Education, Teacher Judgement, and Educational Professionalism.' *European Journal of Education*, 50(1), pp. 75-87. Available at:

[What is Education For? On Good Education, Teacher Judgement, and Educational...: EBSCOhost \(uwtsd.ac.uk\)](#) (accessed: 18th January 2021).

Carter, M.J (2014) 'Gender Socialization and Identity Theory', *Social Sciences*, 3(2), pp. 242-263. Available at: [Gender Socialization and Identity Theory - ProQuest \(uwtsd.ac.uk\)](#) (accessed: 14th January 2021).

Cassidy, S (2016) 'Gender Identity Issues Among Children Increase Tenfold in Six Years'. *The Independent*. 11th February. Available at: [Gender identity issues among children increase tenfold in six years | The Independent | The Independent](#) (accessed: 18th January 2021).

Christensen, J (2016) 'A Critical Reflection of Bronfenbrenner's Development Ecology Model' *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 69, pp. 22-28. Available at: [\(PDF\) A CRITICAL REFLECTION OF BRONFENBRENNER'S DEVELOPMENT ECOLOGY MODEL \(researchgate.net\)](#) (accessed: 18th January 2021).

Conn, W.E (1977) 'Personal Identity and Creative Self-Understanding: Contributions of Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson to the Psychological Foundations of Theology'. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 5(1), pp.34-39. Available at: [Personal identity and creative self-understanding: contributions of Jean Pi...: EBSCOhost \(uwtsd.ac.uk\)](#) (accessed: 14th January 2021).

Eaude, T. (2019) 'The Role of Culture and Traditions in how Young Children's Identities are Constructed', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 24(1), pp. 5–19. doi: [10.1080/1364436X.2019.1619534](#).

Gray, C and MacBlain, S (2015) *Learning Theories in Childhood*. 2nd Ed. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Golshirazian, S., Dhillon, M., Maltz, S., Payne, K.E and Rabow, J (2015) 'The Effect of Peer Groups on Gender Identity and Expression', *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, 2(10), pp. 9-17. Available at: [2.pdf \(ijrhss.org\)](#) (accessed: 18th January 2021).

Gunduz, U (2017) 'The Effect of Social Media on Identity Construction'. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(5). Available at: [The Effect of Social Media on Identity Construction – Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#) (accessed 17th January 2021).

Guy-Evans, O (2020) *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory*. Available at: [Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory | Simply Psychology](#) (accessed: 16th January 2021).

Hazen, E., Schlozman, S. and Beresin, E (2008) 'Adolescent Psychological Development: A Review', *American Academy of Paediatrics*, 29, pp. 161-167. Available at: [\(PDF\) Adolescent Psychological Development: A Review \(researchgate.net\)](#) (accessed: 18th January 2021).

O’Keeffe, G.S., Clarke-Pearson, K and Council on Communications and Media (2011) ‘Clinical Report- The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families’. *American Academy of Paediatrics*, 127(4), pp. 800-806. Available at: [800.full.pdf \(aappublications.org\)](http://800.full.pdf(aappublications.org)) (accessed: 18th January 2021).

Perozzo, C., Sablonniere, R., Auger, E. and Caron-Diotte, M (2016) ‘Social Identity Change in Response to Discrimination’. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 55(3), 438-456. Available at: [Social identity change in response to discrimination.: EBSCOhost \(uwtsd.ac.uk\)](http://Social%20identity%20change%20in%20response%20to%20discrimination.:EBSCOhost(uwtsd.ac.uk)) (accessed: 17th January 2021).

Perves, R.I., Stead, M and Eadie, D (2018) “‘I Wouldn’t be Friends with Someone if They Were Liking Too Much Rubbish”: A Qualitative Study of Alcohol Brands, Youth Identity and Social Media’. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(2), p. 349.

Schachter, E.P. and Ventura, J.J (2008) ‘Identity Agents: Parents as Active and Reflective Participants in Their Children’s Identity Formation’. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 18(3), pp. 449-476. Available at: [Identity Agents: Parents as Active and Reflective Participants in Their Chi...: EBSCOhost \(uwtsd.ac.uk\)](http://Identity%20Agents:%20Parents%20as%20Active%20and%20Reflective%20Participants%20in%20Their%20Chi...:EBSCOhost(uwtsd.ac.uk)) (accessed: 15th January 2021).

Scott, H., Biello, S.M., Woods, H.C (2019) ‘Social Media Use and Adolescent Sleep Patterns: Cross-Sectional Findings from the UK Millennium Cohort Study’, *BMJ Open*, pp. 1-9. Available at: [Social media use and adolescent sleep patterns: cross-sectional findings from the UK millennium cohort study | BMJ Open](http://Social%20media%20use%20and%20adolescent%20sleep%20patterns:%20cross-sectional%20findings%20from%20the%20UK%20millennium%20cohort%20study%20|%20BMJ%20Open) (accessed 18th January 2021).

Sharma, S (2014) ‘Self, Identity and Culture’, *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Consciousness and the Self*, pp.117-124. Available at: [PDF Self, Identity and Culture \(researchgate.net\)](http://PDF%20Self,%20Identity%20and%20Culture%20(researchgate.net)) (accessed: 18th January 2021).

Smith, L (2018) *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Educational Interventions*. Available at: [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\): educational interventions | Iriss](http://Adverse%20Childhood%20Experiences%20(ACEs):%20educational%20interventions%20|%20Iriss) (accessed: 18th January 2021).

Stets, J.E and Burke, P.J (2000) ‘Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory’. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3), pp. 224-237. Available at: [Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory on JSTOR \(uwtsd.ac.uk\)](http://Identity%20Theory%20and%20Social%20Identity%20Theory%20on%20JSTOR(uwtsd.ac.uk)) (accessed 16th January 2021).

Stets, J and Serpe, R.T (2013) ‘Identity Theory’. *Handbook of Social Psychology*, pp. 31-60. Available at: [PDF Identity Theory \(researchgate.net\)](http://PDF%20Identity%20Theory%20(researchgate.net)) (accessed: 17th January 2021).

Stryker, S and Burke, P.J (2000) ‘The Past, Present and Future of Identity Theory’. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(4), pp. 284-297. Available at: [The Past, Present, and Future of an Identity Theory on JSTOR \(uwtsd.ac.uk\)](http://The%20Past,%20Present,%20and%20Future%20of%20an%20Identity%20Theory%20on%20JSTOR(uwtsd.ac.uk)) (accessed 15th January 2021).

Tajfel, H. (1972) ‘Some developments in European social psychology’. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 2(3), pp. 307-321

Tajfel, H., Turner, J. C., Austin, W. G., & Worchel, S. (1979). 'An integrative theory of intergroup conflict'. *Organizational identity: A reader*, pp. 56-65.

Unicef (2021) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Available at: [Layout 1 \(unicef.org.uk\)](#) (accessed 17th January 2021).

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2019) *Education Transforms Lives*. Available at: [Education transforms lives \(unesco.org\)](#) (accessed: 14th January 2021).

Wave Trust (no date) *What Are Adverse Childhood Experiences?* Available at: [What are Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)? | WAVE Trust](#) (accessed: 18th January 2021).

Weinreich, P. & Saunderson, W. (2003) *Analysing identity cross-cultural, societal, and clinical contexts*, London: Routledge.

Welsh Government (2018) *Enabling Gypsies, Roms and Travellers*. Available at: [Enabling Gypsy, Roma & Traveller \(gov.wales\)](#) (accessed: 16th January 2021).

World Health Organisation (2020) *New WHO Guidelines on Promoting Mental Health Among Adolescents*. Available at: [New WHO guidelines on promoting mental health among adolescents](#) (accessed: 17th January 2021).

Yunger, J.L., Carver, P.R. and Perry, D.G (2004) 'Does Gender Identity Influence Children's Psychological Well-Being?' *Developmental Psychology*, 40(4), pp 572-582. Available at: [Does Gender Identity Influence Children's Psychological Well-Being?: EBSCOhost \(uwtsd.ac.uk\)](#) (accessed: 17th January 2021).