

How identity is talked about

Younger children focus on describing *external* characteristics when they talk about who they are - for example, physical appearance and routine activities they participate in.

As children get older, they focus more on *internal* characteristics - emotions, relationships with others.

Harter outlines a developmental sequence:

Behaviour/objective facts → qualities of character (happy, sad) → intrapersonal traits (shy, friendly) → description of self in terms of attitudes & emotions.

In the West, development of identity is seen as the process of becoming a self-aware individual. **Maccoby** points out that a sense of self is not a quick accomplishment, but develops incrementally and is produced by the increasing complexity of an individual's understandings. Some therefore take the view that identity develops over the entire lifespan, not just in childhood.

Cultural differences in the importance of individuality

Geertz argues that the concept of the 'primacy of the individual' is not a universal experience, but is a Western cultural perspective.

Tobin et al - comparison of pre-school settings in Japan, China, USA; school teachers observing video-taped behaviour of a Japanese pre-schooler.

US perspective - child was intellectually gifted & easily bored.

Japanese perspective - concerned with the child's lack of social skills and his inability to be dependent.

Japanese teachers valued empathy, gentleness, cooperativeness, obedience & enthusiasm. They encouraged children to see themselves as being the

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same as others. They believed children benefit from being part of a large, homogeneous group. This contrasts with Western values of independence & creativity in the development of identity.

Identity is therefore a *constructed* concept - there is nothing inherently universal.

An emerging sense of identity

Maccoby - sense of self emerges by degrees. Process consists of two features:

- The self as a subject (of experience)
- The self as an object (of knowledge)

Establishing that I exist

James - self as subject (the 'I')

- (a) awareness of own agency (ability to act)
- (b) awareness of uniqueness of own experiences
- (c) awareness of continuity of own identity
- (d) aware of being aware (reflexiveness)

These features emerge as children explore their environment and interact with their caregivers

Parents imitating infant behaviour is a big source of information for children - **Meltzoff** studied 14 m.o. seated opposite 2 adults. All had an identical toy. One of the adults copied child's actions with the toy. Found that the child smiled and looked longer at the adult that imitated them - hence preferred imitative activity. **Dunn & Kendrick** - similar findings with 8 m.o. children.

Represents (a) and (b).

(c) and (d) more difficult to investigate - as young children can't give their own account of these aspects of identity.

Social Categories - 'self as object'

James - self as object (the 'Me')

Qualities of characteristics that define an individual - e.g. gender, name, size, relationship with others.

Once children gain self-awareness they and others place them into a series of categories used to uniquely identify themselves.

Others have elaborated on 'Me' - the categorical self since **James**. Aspect of the self most influenced by social factors as it is made up of social roles. Emphasising the importance of social context in development has led to much theoretical work in this area.

Cooley & Mead - 'the looking-glass self' - people see themselves as they are reflected in others. **Mead** saw the self & social world as closely linked - the self is a social structure, arising from social experience; therefore the two things cannot be separated - 'social interactionist' viewpoint.

Without being part of a community a child could not develop a sense of self as understood in the West.

e.g. Account of Victor; lived in the woods in France around 1800, alone until he was 12. Contemporary account show that he lacked the social experience Mead sees as important. Victor had characteristics of the 'I'; but very few of the 'Me' - categorical self.

Lewis & Brooks-Gunn - self recognition starts at around 15 m.o., -e.g. rouge dabbed on nose, put in front of mirror; if child knows what they look like this should surprise them. Not stable at 15 m.o. - if other cues are missing then they don't recognise themselves - e.g. still photo vs video images - at 15-18m.o. more recognition from video images. Argument made that self-recognition is therefore a key developmental milestone.

Most graphic expression of self-awareness is tantrums - common in 18m.o - 3y.o. in Western societies. The child is already showing an awareness of self at this stage through the use of words like 'Me' and 'Mine'.

Cooley stresses importance of struggles with rivals.

Bronson found disagreements between children increase sharply between 1-2 years - often over a toy none of them are playing with - asserting 'ownership' because of a link to 'self'. May be less prevalent in societies where sole possession of objects is less important.

Next three chapters:

Gender identity - key to children at an early age and continues to be built on as children get older and negotiate increasingly complex understandings.

National identity - feature in middle childhood. Its importance varies according to location, but the desire for children to describe themselves in terms of where their parents came from is high.

Consumer identity - largely within the experience of adolescents. Young people construct identities around the consumption of goods, clothes & leisure activities.