

# Chapter 20

## Identity Awareness

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### ABSTRACT

*To ensure an effective transformative learning, the concept of self and personal identity is a germane concept that needs the attention of researchers and other stakeholders. This chapter gives a clear expose of the concept of self or personal identity, its representation in an online interaction (online identity), how people manage their online identities as well as challenges to online identity management. The chapter concludes by discussing the implication of identity awareness to transformative learning.*

### INTRODUCTION

Transformative learning, a concept first introduced in 1978 by Jack Mezirow (Imel, 1998) is usually conceived to mean learning to make our own interpretations rather than acting on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others in such a way as to result in healing and transforming persons, institutions, economies, and political systems locally and globally (Garcia 1998).

According to Apostol (2007), individual and social transformation is among the most important goals of education and any education really is and should be transformative, involving a shift in con-

sciousness that begins with teaching and learning. She argued that transformative education is needed today because our society needs to change, as at present, local and global societies are characterized by rampant poverty, social injustice, bigotry, terrorism, environmental degradation, economic disparity between the rich and the poor, women and child abuse, graft and corruption, and unethical use of science and technology.

Also, Sullivan (2003) posited that the deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions involved in transformative learning requires our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures

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of class, race and gender; our body awarenesses, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. These seem to form the underlying thrust of the actual self.

### What is Identity?

The self, a key construct in psychology referring to the cognitive representation of one's identity, is known to play an integral part in human motivation, cognition, affect, and social identity. It is also described as the essential quality that makes a person distinct from all others and the agent responsible for the thoughts and actions of an individual. It is therefore expected to endure through time such that the thoughts and actions at different moments may pertain to the same self. In philosophy, the self is the agent, the knower and the ultimate locus of personal identity (Perry, 1995). However, Arnold (2007) argued that identity may not have a particular definition as it would vary depending on the conception of the person giving the definition. He gave an example of such variation:

*“In philosophy, identity is whatever makes an entity definable and recognizable, in terms of possessing a set of qualities or characteristics that distinguish it from entities of a different type. Or, in layman's terms, identity is whatever makes something the same or different.*

He concluded that identity is anything that makes an entity specific and warned that although identity is not trust, it is actually required to implement trust. Furthermore, Bosworth and Kabay (2002) described identity as:

*.....the collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing is definitively recognizable or known; or*

*....the set of behavioural or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of group; or*

*....the quality or condition of being the same as something else; or*

*.....the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity; individuality.*

According to Deaux (2001) identity is sometimes used to refer to a sense of integration of the self, in which different aspects come together in a unified whole. Hence concepts like gender identity, social identity, cultural identity and so on are not unusual bedfellows to the self or personal identity. Personal identity is commonly achieved by naming, although this varies across cultures, while on the other hand, social identities are commonly identified by the form of the name. For instance, male Spanish names end in an 'o' while their female names end in 'a'. Africans name their children on the basis of reminiscences of the past, for instance, after ancestors or past braveries.

Personal identity is usually in form of physical appearance, but people have different physical appearances - notably the sexual gender, shape of the face, skin pigmentation, height, and colour of hair. The choice of clothing and bodily adornments also varies (Word IQ, 2009). In the social identity theories, a person has not one, "personal self", but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel and act on basis of his personal, family or national "level of self" (ICR, 2004). According to Ylvisaker (2006), construction of identity is rarely a deliberate, self-conscious process. He chronicled the trends of identity development:

*“Early in life, the sense of self is associated with the security, protection, and acceptance that infants, toddlers, and preschoolers feel when effectively cared for by adults to whom they feel*

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