



Leisure and Consumption

Introduction

What factors most shape our identity? Does our identity come from our family, our friends and peers, our job, our relationships or our culture? It would be fair to argue that it comes from all those factors. However, we could also argue that in a globalised world, what we buy defines who we are also, and this needs to be considered.



The information in this Factsheet would be relevant to exam questions on the topic of Culture & Identity.

Activity: Think about your consumer habits and answer the following questions:

- When you eat out or buy take-away, what is your favourite restaurant?
- What makes your mobile/smart phone?
- What makes your shoes?
- Who is your favourite music artist/band/performer?



Identity

The first thing to know about identity, is that it is a fluid concept, susceptible to change. Our identities adapt and change as we go through life. Think about musicians such as Madonna, Lady

Gaga, David Bowie, Prince, even Justin Bieber, and it is clear to see that identity can be played with.

Activity: Do you think you adapted your identity when you started your A-Levels, particularly if you left your school to go to a Sixth Form college? If so, how and why? Also speak to fellow students to see if they did.

Richard Jenkins (2008) argues 'identity involves knowing who we are, then knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on.'

For Steph Lawler (2014) identity rests on the idea of marking out similarities and differences from others. The similarities are that we share being human, being a man or a woman, being black or white etc. However, identity is also about feeling unique and different from others. You might share gender and ethnicity with your best friend, but you both consider yourselves as individual and different. She also argues identity needs to be understood not as belonging 'within' the individual person, but as produced between persons and within social relations and that the notion of identity hinges on the paradoxical combination of sameness and difference.

Activity: Think about this notion of similarities and differences, and apply it to your own circumstances – what are the aspects of your identity that you like to think correspond with your peer group and what aspects do you like to think make you an individual?

Socialisation

There are links between culture, identity and socialisation. Identity is not biological, but it is socially constructed, it is created through socialisation. Socialisation transmits culture and identity.

For Jenkins (2008) identities are formed in the socialisation process. Through learning our culture, and through involvement with other individuals, social groups and subcultures, we develop ideas about what makes us similar to and different from others, and our identities are formed.

Activity: Think about your identity and list all the factors that help to shape it e.g. gender, social class, etc.

Postmodernism

All the factors you put on your list, as to what shapes your identity, will hold true, and you would be able to put together good points to argue this. However, postmodernist theorists would argue against your points, by suggesting that these factors are no longer important in the shaping of identity. Metanarratives (means a "big story" - an explanation for everything that happens in a society) can no longer explain an individual's identity – meaning that theories of social class for example, are no longer relevant and cannot explain identity.

For Lyotard (1984) we no longer relate to these metanarratives, when it involves our identity.

Activity: Write a paragraph explaining metanarrative, in relation to identity.

On a general level, postmodernists would argue that people now construct their identities from their leisure and consumption choices. Identities are now much more fluid, and changeable.

For Rojek (1995) leisure in the modern world is associated with freedom from people's main social roles and identity. Postmodernists therefore argue that boundaries between leisure and other areas of social life become broken down, and leisure becomes an end in itself – a way of constructing identity.

Both Rojek and Roberts (1978) suggest that what we do in our leisure time and products we consume, along with the lifestyles we follow are today much more important in forming our identities. We now have an almost infinite free choice of leisure activities and lifestyles that we can adopt any identity we want to.

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Activity: Next time you are in a supermarket check out queue, look at the goods the person in front of you has bought, and make some assumptions about their lifestyle and identity – you will be amazed at how easy this is to do.



Activity: Set up some interviews with some of your A Level Sociology fellow students (though, not people you socialise with) and find out about the leisure pursuits they are involved with, what foods they eat when out, what make of smart phone they have, clothes labels they wear etc. and draw some conclusions about them, then speak to them about these conclusions to see if you were right.

Bocock (2004) goes a little further and suggests that our consumer choices (our tastes and types, image and style of goods we buy) are important factors in defining our identities and the image we wish to project to others. Through our leisure and consumption choices, people are literally shopping for lifestyles and buying and creating identities.



All of this is of course possible because we live in a consumer society, where it is easy to argue, what we buy we are. We buy; therefore, we are!

Scruton et al (1995) show how in modern (pre-postmodern) society, leisure for the masses was a result of organising work within specific hours. However, the more diverse structure of postmodern work has led to changes in leisure culture:

- **Modern** leisure was disciplined,
- **Postmodern** leisure is self-indulgent.

Can you give an example for both of the above?

- **Modern** leisure was a search for self-improvement and relaxation,
- **Postmodern** leisure is the expression of a particular lifestyle.

Can you give an example of both of the above?

- **Modern** leisure was concerned with bodily health,
- **Postmodern** leisure is concerned with lifestyle, appearance and image.

Can you give examples of both of the above?

Activity: Put together a visual wall chart of images of the above to show examples of 'modern' and 'postmodern' leisure.

Activity: Fill in the spaces in the following chart – it is not necessary to fill in every box to build up a picture.

	Food	Music	Clothes labels	Smart phone make	Holiday destination	Particular shops	Leisure activities	Sporting activities	Specific consumer goods
A young girl who idolises Kylie Jenner									
A young male political activist who supports Jeremy Corbyn									
A person in their 20s who has a well-paid job and wants the world to know it									
A mother in her 30s with 2 children, who wants her children to grow up with good values									
A middle-aged man who after 20 years of marriage is newly single and wants to look cool									
A teenage girl who wants to show she does not follow trends									

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It could be argued that in contemporary Britain, leisure has become more home-centred. There are good examples of this – entertainment once available outside the home like football, which would have been played on a muddy pitch, is now available inside the home – whether on television or computer games. This is also true of music and films. A trip to the cinema would have been the only way to see a film at one time, then it became possible to view films on television, but now, audiences can view films on computers, laptops, tablets, even phones. Music can be listened to now on a number of devices in a number of forms.

All the choices we make over the aforementioned activities – football, film, music etc. postmodernists would argue, show how leisure industries have now been transformed to provide a huge range of lifestyle activities that we can all buy into to promote our identities. Katz (2005) suggests that mobile phones have become fashion statements, which are associated with aspirations and identity. Accessories and ring tones personalise them. Ling (2000) argues mobile phones are increasingly part of teenage fashion. They are expressions of group identity – the age, price and style being important elements, they must also be changed regularly to remain fashionable. How often do you change your mobile phone?

Activity: Watch 2 different advertisements for mobile phones (e.g. an Apple and a Samsung advertisement), and make a list of all the aspects of lifestyle the company is trying to sell to its audience.

This vast array of consumer goods would be wasted if there was no way of promoting them. Dominic Strinati (1995) sees the importance and power of the media and popular culture in helping to shape consumer choices. Audiences are bombarded daily with images and messages, which help form our sense of reality and increasingly shape the ways in which we define ourselves.

Jean Baudrillard argues that we live in a media-saturated society, where the media creates the pressures for us to consume and this aids the notion of identity no longer being formed by class, gender, ethnicity, etc. For Bradley (1995) new identities are created by globalisation, which brings different cultural groups into contact. We can now pick ‘n’ mix to create whatever identity we wish. Miller et al. (1998) believe that shopping has become a major leisure activity in its own right, especially for women. Most towns and cities now have a shopping mall, with popular high street chains being a fixture.

For some theorists, such as M Featherstone in *Consumer Culture & Postmodernism* (2007) shopping is not simply about buying products, but lifestyles, helping to establish identities. Shopping for an identity can be taken even further when you consider that we are now able to buy a new body, to establish an identity. We can diet, exercise at fitness clubs, have tattoos, hair extensions, eyebrow enhancements, piercings, face lifts, botox, breast implants, etc. All these things cost us money, and all help to change our bodies in some way, therefore, to some extent changing our identity.

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Activity: Do some research into how many of the following shops are on British high streets or in malls, and find out the country of origin and annual turnover:

Shop	How many	Country of origin	Annual turnover
Zara			
Dorothy Perkins			
Top Shop			
Primark			
H&M			
Jack Wills			
Superdry			
River Island			
Next			
TK Maxx			

Can you make any observations about the data?

Products are packaged with an associated lifestyle, and this is apparent in advertisements, in the dress, home décor, language, physical appearance etc. of how people are represented within these adverts. Providing these lifestyle models, people are encouraged to buy into and help shape their own identity. For Z Bauman and T May (2004) the advertisements for consumer products such as perfumes, clothing, cars etc. is not just about selling the products, because the label is actually more important than the product itself, it is about lifestyle.

For S Taylor (1999) society is transformed into something resembling an endless shopping mall where people now have much greater choice about how they look, what they consume, and what they believe in. Individuals can now become whatever they want to be, highlighting the postmodern pick ‘n’ mix consumer society, where the influence of class, gender and ethnicity become redundant as features of identity. Identity is shaped around the near infinite choice of both leisure activities and consumer goods that are readily available.

Activity: Write a paragraph highlighting the main points of the postmodern perspective on identity.

Exam Hint: In a response to a question such as ‘Evaluate the view that our leisure and consumption choices are the most important factor in shaping our identity’ you would need to include the following (all of which is included in this Factsheet):

- Some explanation of the concepts of culture, identity and socialisation
- Postmodernism – pick ‘n’ mix identities
- Consumer choice
- Consumption
- Media saturation
- Commercialisation of leisure
- Marginalisation of class, gender, ethnicity as aspects of identity.