

Ezra Kanarick and Zoe Garderet - Personal Identity

## **What makes you YOU?**

Objective: Refine the definition of what encompasses a personal identity. Attempt to agree upon consistent criteria that influence personal identity.

- In doing so, think about the difference between accidental and essential properties of identity.

Materials: Baby photos (Multiple life stages: Infant → Toddler → Child → Teenager)

Opening Exercise:

Show our photos and ask the students whether we are the same people as those in the photos.

Why? Why not?

Include some photos of other people to possibly fool them

Scenarios of identity change:

### **Physical changes**

Normal path of aging

- Assuming you have a normal life (no trauma, injury, or memory loss), are you still you throughout all points in your life?

Physical alterations

- Loss of limbs
- Tattoos, piercings
- Organ transplants/blood transfusions
  - Brain transplant

### **Cognitive changes**

Trauma/life-altering experiences

- PTSD
- Depression
- Dementia or amnesia: What is memory's role in identity?

### **Religious concepts**

- What is a soul? Can a soul feel? Can it remember? Are changes to this different from other identity changes?

- The concept of Nirvana in Buddhism/Hinduism (ending the cycle of rebirth by becoming the most “you”)
  - Are your reincarnations still you, and why or why not?
- What happens when you “find god” or “lose god” part-way through your life? What role does religion and the view of the self and afterlife play in identity?

**General questions about identity development:**

- Is there a point in your life where you are the most you?
  - At the end of your life? When your values merge with your current reality?
  - Can you become less “you”?
  - Identity as striving for a better self
- What does it mean to lose yourself?
- Identity vs. personality
- Cause and effect correlation/agency?
  - Do your actions define you?
  - Does having more agency make you more you? Does accomplishing your goals make you more you?

Conclusion:

Were we able to create consistent criteria? What were some of the possible constants in one’s identity

Topics that might be brought up during course of discussion:

Fate

Determinism vs. free will

Collective unconscious

Law and legal insanity