



**QUEER IDENTITY OF ANGELA IN ELLEN WITTLINGER'S  
*PARROTFISH***

**A THESIS**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for  
The Bachelor Degree Majoring Literature in English Department  
Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University**

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## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

The writer honestly confirms that she compiles this thesis by herself and without taking any results from other researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3, and in diploma degree of any university. The writer also ascertains that she does not quote any material from other publications or someone's paper except from the references mentioned.

Semarang, Sept2017

Sheila J Ramadhani

## MOTTO AND DEDICATION

*“Whoever Allah wants good for him, he puts them to test. He puts them through difficulties; like a diamond or gold that has to be burnt after which anything bad from it is removed so that what you have is the pure diamond or the pure gold.”*

*- Prophet Muhammad*

*“There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountaintop of our desires.”*

*- Nelson Mandela*

*I proudly dedicate this thesis to my beloved family and friends, who give me an endless love and always support me if I am on my lowest point.*

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***PARROTFISH***

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As this thesis has been accomplished, I realize that this thesis is still far from perfect. I, therefore, will be glad to receive any constructive criticism, recommendation, and suggestions to make this thesis better. In expecting to be useful for the readers, this thesis can be useful for those who like to learn about queer identity.

Semarang, Sept 2017

Sheila J Ramadhani

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this study, the writer analyzes a novel by Ellen Wittlinger entitled *Parrotfish*, which focuses on the main character named Angela Katz - McNair, who decides to change her identity as a man named Grady Katz - McNair. The aims of this study are to know the background of her previous life that constructs her queer identity, to know her performativity that shows her true identity as a man, and to know her struggle to reveal her true identity toward her surroundings. The writer uses queer theory to analyze Angela's identity. The writer uses library research to collect the data from relevant sources, such as books, journals, and websites. The result of the study is her closeness to her Dad gives the big impact toward the establishment of her true identity and her performativity as a man. The other result is she keeps convincing the surroundings about her true identity, even her transformation is contrary to the gender stereotypes.

Keywords: Queer Theory, Gender Stereotypes, Performativity

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of The Study

It becomes a natural law that God creates humans in two different sexes, which are male and female. These human beings must have many conspicuous differences, which are physical appearances, attitudes, and sexual orientations. Nevertheless, there are so many people out there who feel that they are not in accordance with the sexes that God has already created for them. We usually call them as transgender. The definition of transgender is explained on *Transgender Rights* written by Currah, Juang, and Minter,

“The term *transgender* is intended to cover a broad range of experiences, including transsexual people who undergo medical care and treatment to transition from their assigned sex at birth to the sex that is consistent with their gender identities, people who undergo no medical treatment but also take steps to conform their gender expressions to meet their gender identities....” (Currah, Juang, & Minter, 2006:80).

It means that transgender is an individual who feels that his / her true identity does not fit with his / her physical appearance. Some of the transgenders choose to do medical surgery to make their sex fit with their true identity.

Most of people assume that transgenders must be considered as abnormal and must be avoided, because their identity does not fit with the gender stereotypes. It can be seen that most of the transgenders do not able to socialize with their surroundings, because they are considered as “different”. Because of that problem, many transgenders who belong to LGBT communities demand their rights

ashuman being, so they would be treated equally by the society and there is no discrimination against transgenders.

Based on the real experience of transgender's lives, the writer will analyze a novel from Ellen Wittlinger entitled *Parrotfish*. This novel tells about life of a teenager who chooses to be a transgender.

### **1.2. Research Questions**

There are some questions which can be raised from this novel. The character of Angela or Grady is interesting to be analyzed, because this character has a queer identity as a transgender. The research questions are:

1. How does Angela's background influence her decision to change her identity in *Parrotfish* by Ellen Wittlinger?
2. How does Angela's performativity represent her true identity as a man in *Parrotfish* by Ellen Wittlinger?
3. How does Angela's struggle to defend her true identity as a man in *Parrotfish* by Ellen Wittlinger?

### **1.3. Objectives of The Study**

In order to write this study, the writer has a number of purposes to be achieved as the result of the study. The purposes of this study are:

1. To analyze Angela's background that influences her decision to change her identity in *Parrotfish* by Ellen Wittlinger.

2. To analyze how Angela's performativity represent her true identity as a man in *Parrotfish* by Ellen Wittlinger.
3. To analyze Angela's struggle to defend her true identity as a man in *Parrotfish* by Ellen Wittlinger.

#### **1.4. Methods of The Study**

The author uses library research as the method of the study to gain and study the data and information from books, journals, and articles. Those data and information can help the writer to solve the problems discussed in this study.

This study also uses Queer theory to analyze Angela's true identity.

According to *Queer Theory: An Introduction* written by Jagose,

“...queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire. Institutionally, queer has been associated most prominently with lesbian and gay subjects, but its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery” (Jagose, 1996:3).

It means that queer theory is a theory that focuses on individual's identity that incompatible between sex, gender, and desire; such as homosexuals, transgenders, and gender ambiguity.

According to *Critical Theory Today: A User – Friendly Guide* written by Tyson, “Queer studies ‘queries’ orthodoxies and promotes or provokes such uncertainties, moving beyond lesbian and gay sexualities to include a range of other sexualities that disrupt such fixed or settled categorization altogether” (Tyson,2006:253). It means that queer theory focuses on marginalized identity of individuals who are trapped on gender stereotypes that are available within their society.

## **1.5. Organization of Writing**

This thesis consists of five chapters, those are:

### **CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION**

This chapter consists of six sections: Background of The Study, Research Questions, Objectives of The Study, Methods of The Study, and Organization of Writing.

### **CHAPTER II : BIOGRAPHY AND SUMMARY**

This chapter consists of biography of the author of the novel and the summary of the novel.

### **CHAPTER III : THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter consists of two sections. The first one is the discussion of the intrinsic elements of the novel. It explains about the theory of intrinsic elements in the novel. The second one is the discussion of the extrinsic elements in the novel. It explains about the theory that is used in analyzing the novel.

### **CHAPTER IV : ANALYSIS**

This chapter consists of the writer's analysis in order to answer the research questions that are mentioned in chapter I. The analysis will use the theories discussed in chapter III.

## CHAPTER V : CONCLUSION

This chapter explains about the writer's conclusion about the whole analysis in the chapter IV.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **BIOGRAPHY AND SYNOPSIS**

#### **2.1 Biography of Ellen Wittlinger**

Ellen Wittlinger was born in Belleville, Illinois on October 21, 1948. She left Belleville to continue her study at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. After graduated from Millikin University, she was accepted into The Iowa Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa. She graduated and received Master of Fine Arts degree. After she had graduated from University of Iowa, she got a fellowship for two years in Provincetown at the Fine Arts Work Center. She also worked on The Provincetown Advocate, the local newspaper in Provincetown. When she studied in Provincetown, she had a big passion in playwriting. One of her play entitled "One Civilized Person" got the author's prize at the annual Eastern Massachusetts Association of Community Theaters Competition. She became a finalist for four times in the Massachusetts Artists Fellowship programs. Her passion to write young – adult novels began when she got two children and became a children's librarian. Her first young – adult novel was Lombardo's Law and it was published in 1993. The other teen novels written by her are HEART ON MY SLEEVE, THE LONG NIGHT OF LEO AND BREE, RAZZLE, WHAT'S IN A NAME, HARD LOVE, and PARROTFISH.

Sources: ellenwittlinger.com and teenreads.com accessed on 14 December 2016

## **2.2. Synopsis of *Parrotfish***

Angela Katz – McNair was a teenager who decided to change her identity as a man named Grady Katz – McNair. She decided that decision, because she felt uncomfortable with her physical appearance that was not suitable with her true identity. She always acted like a man since she was a child.

The story began when Angela declared her new identity to her nearest people. She declared her new appearance and her new name as Grady. Unfortunately, Grady's decision gave the big impact to the relationship between Grady and female members of his family. Mom assumed that his decision was the biggest problem for her as a mother. Laura, his little sister, felt ashamed for having a transgender brother in her family. In contrast, Dad and his little brother, Charlie, could accept Grady's decision and they did not really mind about it. His one and only friend, Eve, also felt hard to believe his decision. She was very shocked and chose to leave him. The refusal from Grady's nearest female people made him wonder, whether his decision made them felt abandoned by him, who was a girl before. Meanwhile, his closest male people did not take his decision as a terrible decision and they always supported his choice, especially Dad.

At school, Grady faced so many tensions there. Everybody at school always stared at him thoroughly and talked about his new appearance. It made Grady do not feel confident about himself and worried about everything. This condition got worse when he became the mockery by Eve's new friend, Danya, the most popular student at school. Danya also forbade Eve to be friend with him again, because she thought that he was pervert and abnormal. He also got the

refusal and mockery from teachers, when he asked for permission to change his identity on all of his files. Moreover, the headmaster, Dr. Ridgeway, assumed that Grady was exaggerated and acted recklessly for deciding something, knowing that he was still a teenager.

Nevertheless, there were some people who did not feel bothered with his decision and chose to be his friends, they were Sebastian, Ms. Unger, Russ Gallo, and Kita Charles. They became Grady's new friends, because they supported him and they did not assume that Grady was different. Even though Eve was Danya's friend now, Eve always tried to apologize Grady. She tried to explain that she wanted to have many friends at school, knowing that she just had Grady as her only friend before. She wanted to make him believe that they could be friend again. Nevertheless, Grady was still mad at her, because he felt that she abandoned him and she was not beside him while facing the tensions from his surroundings. He also felt disappointed, because she could not accept his decision as a transgender.

Day by day, the acts of humiliation from students at school got worse. When Grady and Russ had a task to record the basketball assembly, the two best players of the team came out and dressed in women's clothing. They wore a wig on their hair, wore miniskirts, used something to make their chests look like female's breasts, put make up on their faces, and used some jewelers. They walked like a girl and did some ridiculous splits with the cheerleaders. The audiences laughed at their silliness, but Grady was mad with their performance. The other embarrassing humiliation was planned by Danya. She planned to

humiliate him after the gym class. She would take Grady's clothes while Grady would use Ms.Unger's office shower after gym class. Then, Danya would change them with sexy clothes and a pair of high – heels. Luckily, Eve wanted to take the risk by telling him Danya's trick before. So, her trick could be thwarted because of the Sebastian and Ms.Unger's help. Danya got a three day suspension because of her evil trick toward Grady. Because of Eve's bravery, Grady forgave her and he got her back as her best friend.

After receiving many humiliations and rejections from his surroundings, he wondered why people took his decision seriously. He also wondered why some people must obey the gender stereotypes, even though it made them lie about themselves. However, Grady kept holding on his decision, because he felt sick to be forced into a category that did not reflect his true identity. One day, Mom showed her acceptance toward Grady's transformation. Finally, she could call his name after taking some times to realize that her eldest daughter changed as her eldest son. Even though she felt clumsy to call his name, Grady felt happy knowing her struggle to accept the truth about his identity. Moreover, Aunt Gail explained that Mom was shocked at first, but Mom felt so proud of him. She thought that he was so brave to decide that huge and tough decision. One day, Laura told Grady about the truth that most of the students at school did not like Danya, and they weresatisfied about her punishment. Moreover, Laura was told by her friends that Grady was very brave to decide the biggest decision to be a transgender and was very confident with his own identity. It seemed that she

could accept Grady as her brother. Grady felt so relieved and grateful that his nearest people could accept his true identity as a boy.

Day by day, Grady became very interested with Kita Charles. He loved her beauty and kindness toward him. His attraction grew, when she defended him after being humiliated by two basketball players at basketball assembly. Moreover, Kita also showed her attraction toward Grady. She admitted that she liked him. It was shown when he accompanied her, because she broke up with Russ. She always flattered on Grady and said that she liked him. Then, Kita shared her French Fries into his mouth, and it became the best moment of his life. Moreover, they kissed each other once at the cafe. Nevertheless, his expectation to have Kita as his girlfriend must be buried deeply. It happened in the annual event of their school named the Winter Carnival Dance. Grady had an opportunity to dance with Kita. They went to the back of the hall to talk about something. She admitted again that she liked him very much, but she told him that she gave the second chance toward Russ as her boyfriend. Their conversation was ended by kissing each other.

The end of the story is Katz – McNair family held the last performance that they always done every Christmas Eve for entertaining people at their city, Buxton. In this last performance, Grady undertook to write the new script for their play. The whole family was not given the script before, because Grady wanted to give the script when the performance began. When the performance started, the whole family was shocked by the theme of the script, because the theme was the confession from Grady to the audiences about his true identity.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In every literary work, especially a novel, there are intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Those elements are the supporting elements of the whole story. In this chapter, the writer will explain about the theories of those elements that will be used to analyze *Parrotfish* written by Ellen Wittlinger.

#### 3.1. Intrinsic Elements

Intrinsic elements are the basic elements within the story to build the unity of the whole story, such as characters and characterization, theme, point of view, and plot. In this study, the writer will analyze theme, character and characterization, and setting that are contained in this novel.

##### 3.1.1. Theme

According to *The Bedford Introduction to Literature 2<sup>nd</sup>* written by Meyer, “Theme is the central idea or meaning of a story and provides a unifying point around which the plot, character, setting, point of view, symbol, and other elements of a story organized” (Meyer, 1990: 196). It means that theme is the most crucial element for a story, because it is the main idea of the story. Theme can give the readers the core of the story and the messages that will be delivered in the whole story.

##### 3.1.2. Character and Characterization

Character is one of the intrinsic elements of a story that has the important role. It is one of the elements that consists of the performers who have the roles to deliver

the messages of the story. The characterizations of the character are described directly or indirectly in the story by the author. It is in accordance with *The Elements of Fiction 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* written by Perrine,

”Authors may present their characters either directly or indirectly. In direct presentation they tell us straight out, by exposition or analysis, what the characters are like, or have someone else in the story tell us what they are like. In indirect presentation the authors show us the characters in action; we infer what they are like from what they think or say or do” (Perrine, 1987:66).

According to Perrine in M.J Turner’s book entitled *The Study of English Literature*, there are two kinds of character, which are static and dynamic. Static character “...remains the same at the end of the story as he was at the beginning.” (Turner, 2002: 14). On the other hand, dynamic character “...undergoes a permanent change in some aspect of his character, attitudes, personality, or behavior.” (Turner,2002:14). Normally, the main character in a novel is dynamic, because the characterizations of the main character are changed. Those changes give the impacts to the progress of the story.

### **3.1.3. Setting**

Setting is one of the intrinsic elements of a story that shows the background of the story. There are several kinds of setting, which are setting of place, time, and social environment. It is in accordance with *A Glossary of Literary Terms* written by Abrams,

“...the overall setting of a narrative or dramatic work is the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which its action occurs; the setting of a single episode or scene within such a work is the particular physical location in which it takes place” (Abrams,1990:285).

According to *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing* written by Kennedy and Gioia, “Setting of place directs the location of the event happens in the novel. It includes the physical environment of the story such as a house, a street, a city, a landscape” (Kennedy and Gioia, 1991: 80). It means that setting of place is the setting that shows the locations or places described in the story. Setting of place is the description of houses, buildings, cities, public places, etc.

According to Kennedy and Gioia, “But beside place, setting may crucially involve the time of the story – hour, year, or century” (Kennedy, 1991: 80). It means that setting of time is the setting that shows the time of the story. The setting of time is the description of seasons, weathers, hours, months, etc.

According to Meyer, “Time, location, and the physical features of the setting can all be relevant to the overall purpose of the story. So too is the social environment in which the character are developed” (Meyer, 1990: 108). It means that setting of social environment is to show the social conditions described in the story, such as the politics, culture, and social class.

#### **3.1.4. Conflict**

Conflict is the core element of the story that forms and develops the plot. According to Kennedy and Gioia, “The clash creates a drama in the story. Drama in fiction occurs in any clash of wills, desires, or power” (Kennedy and Gioia, 1990: 40). Conflict is described when there is the inner struggle within a character or the contradictory thoughts between characters.

According to *Literature Structure, Sound, and Sense* written by Perrine, there are three kinds of conflict,

“The main character may be pitted against some other person or group or persons (man against man); he may be in conflict with some external force – physical nature, society, or fate, (man against environment), or between the main character and some destructive elements in his own nature (man against himself)” (Perrine, 1988: 42).

### **3.2 Extrinsic Elements**

To analyze the extrinsic elements in *Parrotfish*, the writer uses queer theory. By using queer theory, the writer will analyze the queer identity of the main character in this novel.

#### **3.2.1 Queer Theory**

Queer theory emerges as the connector between gay liberationist and lesbian feminist. At that time, the lesbians feel marginalized by the gays, because homosexuals are only classified as the gays at that time. On the other hand, gay liberationists hold on to the male supremacy. According to Jagose, “Access to employment and an independent income has been both easier and more profitable for men than for women and, in criminal law, homosexuality has been constituted almost exclusively as a masculine proclivity” (Jagose,1996:45). It means that males have the highest position in every aspect within society and have more profitable prerogatives rather than women. According to Schneir in Jagose,

“Lesbian is the word, the label, the condition that holds women in line . . . Lesbian is a label invented by the Man to throw at any woman who dares to be his equal, who dares to challenge his prerogatives (including that of all women as part of the exchange medium among men), who dares to assert the primacy of her own needs.” (Jagose,1996:48).

Those problems make lesbians feel marginalized by gays, and gays assume that lesbian is a term for homosexual women who dare to resist male supremacy and try to get the same privileges as men.

According to Jagose, queer theory “...offers an antidote to the perceived limitations of lesbian feminism, which include its categorisation of lesbians as 'women' rather than 'homosexuals'....” (Jagose,1996:116). It means that queer theory emerges in order to omit the gender difference between gays and lesbians as homosexuals. According to Jagose, “Initially gay liberation and lesbian feminism advocated a wholesale sexual revolution; increasingly they consolidated themselves as civil rights movements intent on securing equality for marginalised minority groups” (Jagose,1996:58). It means that queer theory also emerges to be the mediator between gay liberation and lesbian feminism, knowing that both communities have the same vision as communities of marginalized identity.

According to *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism, and Theory: Third Edition* written by Bennet and Royle, the definition of the term ‘queer’ is “... a category apart, a self – defining and identifiable group determined precisely by the queer difference of its members from the regime of the normal...” (Bennet and Royle,2004:188). It means that the term ‘queer’ is addressed to the individuals who have the different characteristics of their identity with the gender stereotypes or regimes within their society. According to Tyson,

“Furthermore, some lesbians and gay men have adopted the word queer as an inclusive category for referring to a common political or cultural ground shared by gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and all people who

consider themselves, for whatever reasons, nonstraight.” (Tyson,2006: 334).

It means that the term ‘queer’ becomes the umbrella for those people who feel that their identity is marginalized by their surroundings, such as homosexuals, bisexuals, and transgenders.

### **3.2.1.1 Sexual Identity**

Generally, people cannot distinguish the difference of sex and gender. According to *Queer Theory: Readers in Cultural Criticism* written by Morland and Willox, sex is “... seen (by these definitions) as tending to be immutable, immanent in the individual, and biologically based,....”(Morland and Willox,2005: 84). It means sex is the physical appearance of individual, which is divided into male and female. Meanwhile, gender is “... the far more elaborated, more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviours – of male and female persons – in a cultural system...” (Morland and Willox,2005: 83). It means that gender is the characteristics of an individual that describes the roles or stereotypes within society in accordance to the biological sex. Gender is divided into two, masculine / man or feminine / woman.

Gender is not naturally constructed in accordance to the sexual appearance. According to *Gender Trouble* written by Butler, “Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of “men” will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that “women” will interpret only female bodies” (Butler,1990:6). It means that genders cannot be divided into man and woman, because “masculine” characteristics do not always

related to the male physical appearance, and “feminine” characters do not always related to the female physical appearance. According to Tyson, gender is

“...completely controlled neither by our biological sex (male or female) nor by the way our culture translates biological sex into gender roles (masculine or feminine)... it is socially constructed (rather than inborn) to the extent that it is based on the way in which sexuality is defined by the culture in which we live.” (Tyson,2006:335-336).

It means that gender is socially constructed as the effects of someone’s background or social environment. For example, a boy who always surrounded by girls and loves to play with them may give the impact of the establishment of his gender that may have the feminine roles.

Consequently, the definition of identity in accordance to Jagose is, “... not a demonstrably empirical category but the product of processes of identification.” (Jagose,1996:9). It means that identity is someone’s identification or awareness about his / her gender. According to Jagose, “Identity is fluid, the effect of social conditioning and available cultural models for understanding oneself.” (Jagose,1996: 8). It means that identity is mutable following the effect of background or social environment of an individual.

### **3.2.1.2 Performativity**

Gender is socially constructed rather than naturally constructed because of the effects of someone’s background or social environment. For example, a boy who is always surrounded by girls and loves to play with them may give the impact of the establishment of his identity. It happens if he always imitates their feminine acts or deeds. It can establish his feminine side, even though his physical appearance is male. According to Judith Butler’s notion, gender is

constructed because of the repetition of acts in someone's daily life. According to Butler in Jagose,

“No longer a natural basis for solidarity, gender is refigured by Butler as a cultural fiction, a performative effect of reiterative acts: ‘Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’”. (Jagose, 1996:84).

It means that the environment affects the repetition of acts in his / her daily life. This repetition becomes the habit and constitutes the true identity of the individual. This notion is called Performativity.

According to Butler's journal entitled *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*,

“When Simone de Beauvoir claims, “one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman”, she is appropriating and reinterpreting this doctrine of constituting acts from the phenomenological tradition. In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts”. (Butler, 1988:519).

Inspired by Beauvoir's notion, Butler concludes that gender constitutes the identity in accordance to the patterned actions which are done repeatedly.

According to Butler,

“To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project.” (Butler, 1988:522).

Butler explains about Beauvoir's notion that being a female is different from being a woman. It is because being a woman, an individual is forced to behave in

accordance to the woman stereotypes that are available in society. That is why Butler agrees that identity is not constituted naturally, but socially constructed. The gender stereotypes may give the effects of its formation. According to Butler in Jagose, "...‘performative insofar as it is the effect of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchised under constraint’,.... ”. (Jagose,1996:88). So, there are many individuals who have the identity that are constituted by the force of gender stereotypes that are available in their society. According to Butler, “Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect... that culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism....” (Butler,1988:528).It means that, if an individual does not perform his / her performativity that are not suitable with the stereotypes, he / she will get the negative reaction from surroundings, such as marginalization.Nevertheless, queers have performativity that are not suitable with the stereotypes, and they generally get the discrimination or marginalization from their surroundings.It is because they feel comfortable to repeat their acts or performativity that are opposed to the stereotypes, and the social effects give the different impacts in constituting their true identity.

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