Defining My Social Identity

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[Institutional Affiliation(s)]

Author Note

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I am Yigit, an opinionated, assertive, yet an honest individual who, like other human beings, is a product of various social influences. I am a Turk-Muslim, hailing from a conservative family, but a person who is open to other opinions. A number of characteristics that define me as an individual have either been acquired from my social environment, or have been hereditary. I am part of a traditional urban middle-class nuclear family living in Ankara. My father and mother are a loving, happily married couple who place a lot of importance on family, and take pride in raising and instructing their children with the values and beliefs they cherish. In my family, children are given certain chores to perform since the start, which instill a sense of responsibility in them while there is little to no tolerance of deviant behavior. My mother was very particular about being honest all the time. She taught me that regardless of the circumstances being difficult, honestly always pays off. Thus, a great deal of who I am and the values I ended up cherishing were a hereditary in nature, and significantly affected the person I am today

Besides being a brother and a son, the most important social role I have played is as a student. As a young student, I built upon the values I had acquired from my family and was introduced to new social skills. I learnt the rules of what is acceptable behavior in groups, and realized that a lack of compliance with such rules would lead to social sanctions. As I entered high school, I was introduced to social hierarchies, either from class divisions or arising from popularity. Forming associations with middle-class and upper-class students allowed me to plan, evaluate and reflect upon who I am and my identity with respect to the settings I was in. I wanted to spend time with groups of students who would engage in more thrilling activities while also wanting to fulfill my family’s expectations in achieving higher academic grades, like the other group did. My experiences with dating helped me understand the more emotional aspects of life, and these experiences contributed to the development of my emotional control, and higher moral values that I realized I had to conduct myself with, to be seen as a dignified and responsible adult.

After I graduated, I wanted to visit the U.S. and explore other cultures besides the one I grew in. As an International student enrolled at Texas Wesleyan University, I found myself in a vastly different environment that I was used to. In my view, my decision to visit the U.S. and my choice of major was influenced more by my heredity. I am someone who hailed from a working-class family. My grandfather was a tax-attorney who earned a respectable middle-class income, and encouraged my father to join the military. Similarly, my mother came from a family of doctors who although used to be very pre-occupied with work, strove hard to balance work and family, and helped provide stability and care for her 3 children. I am privileged of belonging to a family of parents who came from working class backgrounds by means of which they enjoyed a stable home, family care and economic well-being. It was almost natural for me to choose the STEM field instead of majors associated with art, culture, gender studies, or film. I had seen my parents save money to pay for my tuition and avoid many luxuries in life. This created a natural understanding in me that I too have to work to achieve stability in life, instead of taking too many risks.

As a Turk, who hails from a Muslim-majority and collectivist society, I am more inclined to see myself in terms of the group I represent. However, I see how different economic, structural, social and geographical factors can shape an individual differently, who may have made a different career or lifestyle choices than I did. These varying social, familial and economic factors, carry social implications and consequences. The social structure in which other people live, as well as the interdependent institutions within it play a major role in defining their choices in life, just as my career choices were influenced by my family’s and my ancestor’s occupations. Reflecting on these social, environmental and hereditary influences helps me discover and understand my personal identity, who I am or how others see their place in society.