

How we Construct Identity

How do gender roles, power and cultural values influence how we construct identity?

INTRODUCTION

We will explore how gender roles are embedded in social practices through power and cultural values, by exploring what beliefs are dominant in Western society and how they have become normalised.



STUDYING GENDER

Performativity theory says gender is a social construction based on self-identity. And so, gender is a fluid performance and the differences between men and women are purely social, which leads to gendered values about how we should behave (Butler, 2002).



WHAT IS POWER

Field theory (Bourdieu, 1993) suggests reality is a social concept organised into three capitals (Fig.1): Social ('who you know'), Economic (financial wellbeing) and Culture (cultural norms). Capitals establish the level of power a person has and creates their reality.

CONCLUSION

By comparing the two interviews, it highlights the social disparities between men and women. It illustrates how people have a complex relationship with their identity in relation to culture, and how past experiences shape future outcomes.

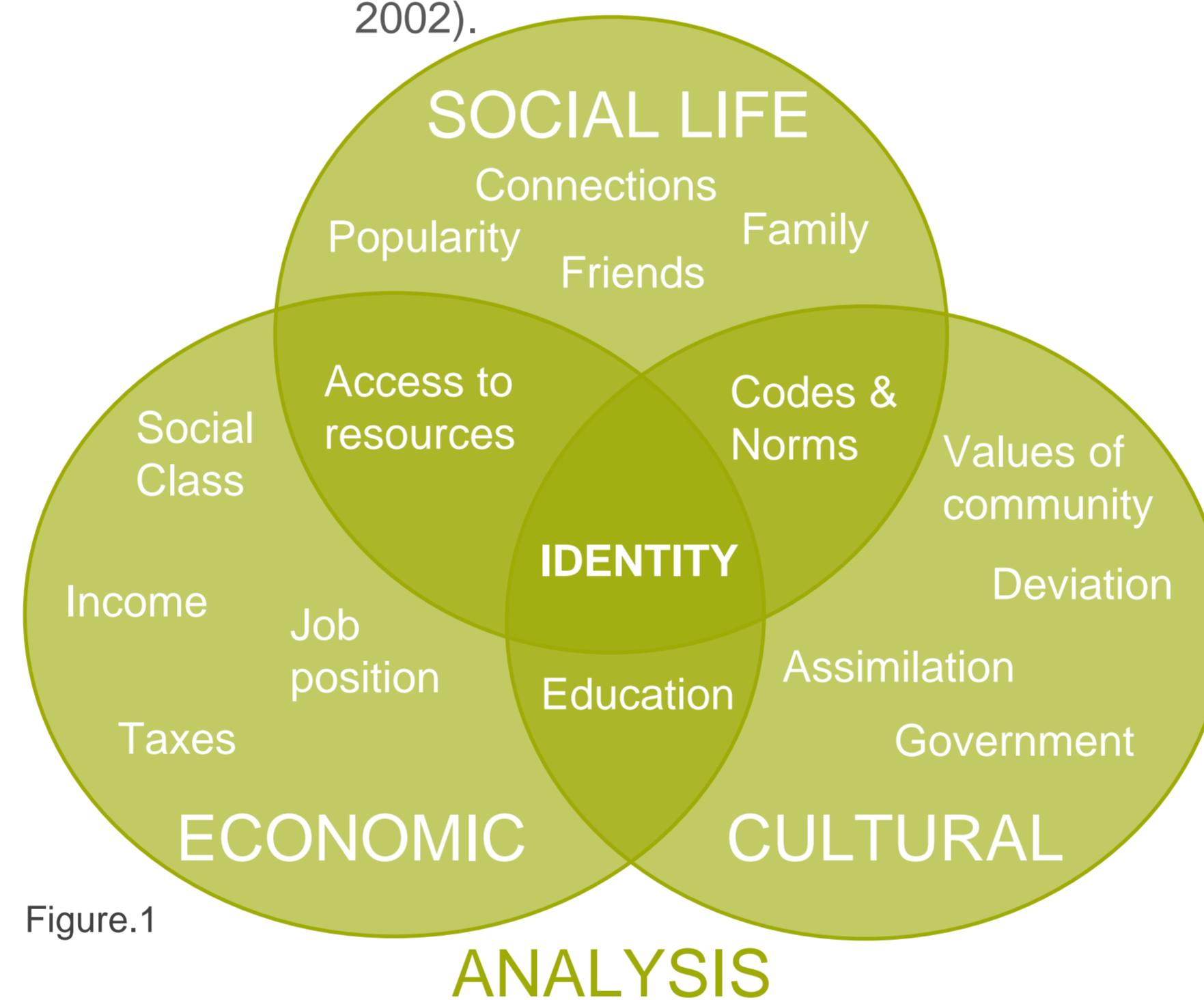


Figure.1

METHODOLOGY

This study used two semi-structured interviews to better understand the social world of the interviewee. One male and one female Brookes student participated in a 30 minute interview about pivotal life moments: childhood experiences, romantic life, career and life pursuits, and expression of self.

“I wanted to go into politics but there’s so much pressure to succeed and to just make it, just to get by.” -Marq

Marq desires to increase his economic capital in order to form a middle class status, because he is unable to turn his passion into financial action. It reflects how in a capitalist culture, there is a need for personal sacrifice.

“I prioritize having a family over a career, and if my financial situation allows it, I would quit my job” - Claire

Claire values family and is willing to sacrifice a career she has been educated for years in, for motherhood. A reason for this is because she is from an upper class family and already has economic capital, therefore she has little incentive to gain more money.

“There were a lot of classmates that thought I was gay, even though I’m not”- Marq

Dressing and/or behaving differently sometimes results in what Butler (2002) calls ‘symbolic violence’, where certain ways of being are discriminated against as it poorly reflects on Marq’s lower social and class status. It is a reason people attempt to fit in, due to the fear of social rejection.

“My sense of style is pretty girlish because I like to wear dresses, heels, makeup and lipstick.” - Claire

Claire is following the conventions of her culture by following a popular idea of feminine beauty to gain cultural capital. It reflects how beauty becomes a commodified or standardised asset, rather than believing beauty is found from within.