

# IEL I

## 2025

### Unit 1: **Individual and Social Identities**

### DOSSIER

# **Introduction Culture & Identity: an introduction**

**Jon Austin**

## **Understanding Identity and Culture**

The word "identity" is used a lot in today's discussions about society, culture, and ourselves. It's a key word with many meanings. Simply put, identity is who we are, both as individuals and as groups.

## **Everyday Ideas of Identity**

In our daily lives, we often identify people easily: "a young woman," "a music fan," "someone from Generation X." We categorize people quickly, making assumptions based on these labels, even from brief encounters. Increasingly, we form opinions about people through media, without meeting them directly.

## **The Complexity of Identity**

Despite its common use, identity is a complex topic studied by many experts. They examine how we form our identities.

- **Janet Helms (1993)**, studying race, defined identity as a sense of belonging to a group based on shared racial heritage.
- **Social theorist Weeks (1990)** described identity as a sense of belonging and difference. It's about what we share with some people and what separates us from others, giving us a sense of personal place. It also includes the values we share or want to share.

Identity involves claiming a connection to others based on shared characteristics, which often relate to culture.

## **The Evolution of "Culture"**

Like "identity," the meaning of "culture" has changed. Originally, culture meant the way of life of a group, something people possess and live.

- Traditionally, culture was seen as something that new members of a group learn, like a "National Geographic" view of a tribe or ethnic group.
- More recently, culture is seen as something people create through daily interactions. It's not fixed but constantly evolving, with variations within a group. This makes it difficult to generalize about "Australian culture" or "Asian culture."
- Also, "culture" now refers to smaller groups, like street gangs or music scenes. Teachers are trying to understand the changing cultures in schools.

## **This Book's Focus**

This book explores different aspects of culture and identity, helping readers understand:

- "Who am I?" (individual identity)
- "Who are we?" (group identity)
- "What does this mean for educators?"

The book discusses how individual identity is formed, the meaning of Australian identity in a global world, and how teachers can address identity issues in education.

## **Changes in Australian Society**

Australian society is changing rapidly, causing anxiety.

- **Mackay (1993)** described this period as one of "unprecedented social, cultural, political, economic and technological change," where Australians are redefining their way of life.
- He argued that the "Age of Anxiety" is really an "Age of Redefinition," where people feel their identities are threatened.

## **Current Debates on Australian Identity**

The question of Australian identity is frequently discussed in the media. Some argue that the shared land is the main element of Australian identity. Artists also reflect on this topic.

## **The Role of Schools**

Schools play a crucial role in helping students understand their identity. While some argue that other influences are stronger, schools can be important places for critical reflection on identity.

The book aims to encourage thinking about "who am I?" and "who are we?" Ultimately, it hopes to inspire educators to consider "who do we want to become?" Understanding our own identities helps us respect and support the diverse identities of our students.

Each chapter offers different perspectives, contributing to a broader understanding of identity.

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## **Identity and Identity formation**

### **Thinking About Identity**

These days, everyone seems to be talking about "identity." You see it in serious books, in newspapers, and even in songs and movies. For example, the song "Who Are You?" and the movie "The Net" both deal with the idea of identity. It's a very important topic now.

We use our identity every day. We use cards to borrow books or rent movies, and we use PIN numbers to show who we are. For teachers, showing our identity is important to prove we are suitable to work with children.

### **Identification vs. Identity**

We often use the word "identity" for things like cards and PINs. But these things are really "identification." They show *who* we are on the surface, like our name, age, and address. These things are just labels. They don't tell the whole story.

For example, a name can give a hint about someone's background. After the 9/11 attacks, people with "Middle Eastern-sounding" names faced problems. An age might suggest someone's style or music taste. A photo might give an idea of someone's race or culture. But these are just quick guesses. They don't truly show someone's identity.

We need to understand what "identity" really means.

### **Identity as a "Key Word"**

"Identity" is a "key word," as Raymond Williams said. This means it's a word that everyone uses to talk about society. But identity only becomes a big issue when it's in trouble, when we feel unsure about who we are.

### **Our Current Time: Postmodernity**

We live in a special time called "postmodernity." Many experts think this time is unique. While this book isn't just about postmodernity, it's important to understand it because it affects our identity.

### **The Postmodern Era: Key Ideas**

Many people today feel that life has changed a lot. For older people, who grew up in more stable times, these changes can be hard to understand. But younger people have only known a world with many different things, not just one.

A main idea of our time is that there's no "one size fits all." Unlike the past, when there were clear rules and beliefs, now we have many choices and differences.

## **The End of Old Certainties**

Jean-Francois Lyotard, a social theorist, talked about this change in his book. He said we live in a "postmodern condition." He explained that we no longer believe in "grand narratives" – big stories that explain the world.

For example, we used to believe that science could solve all our problems. But events like Auschwitz showed that science can also cause harm. We also used to believe in "progress" – that life always gets better. But now, we see that things are not always improving.

## **Feelings of Uncertainty**

The loss of these old beliefs has caused feelings of uncertainty and sadness. We feel like we don't belong and that the world is confusing.

## **Key Features of the Postmodern Era:**

- **Weakening of old values:** We don't believe in the old rules as much.
- **End of big stories:** We don't believe in the old stories about progress and reason.
- **Fragmented identity:** It's harder to find a clear sense of who we are.
- **Changing sources of belonging:** We don't rely on the same groups as before.
- **Many different views:** We accept that there are many ways to see the world.
- **Uncertainty is normal:** We know that things can change quickly.
- **Focus on copies and images:** We see many copies of things, especially in media.
- **The importance of media:** Television and the internet influence how we see the world.

## **Identity in the Postmodern World**

In this world, there are no fixed identities. We create our identities from the images and roles we see around us. This is why identity is such a big topic today. We are trying to understand what it means to be ourselves.

This book explores these ideas about identity in the postmodern era.

## **Understanding Identity**

The word "identity" is used a lot today, along with words like "difference" and "diversity." These words help us describe our changing society. Identity is about feeling uncertain and trying to find our place.

In this book, we look at identity from a social and cultural point of view, not just from a personal, psychological one. We want to understand how groups and cultures shape our identities. We become who we are based on where we find ourselves in society. Often, we don't even realize how we got there.

### **Claiming and Being Given an Identity**

We often claim our identity based on how we feel we are similar to others. We don't usually think about it much. For example, someone might say they are "indigenous" later in life. This can make people suspicious, as if they have hidden reasons. It's because we don't expect people to choose their identity so consciously.

At the same time, others give us identities. When we say who we are, we also say who we are not. For example, if you say you are "female," you also imply you are "not male." We often put people into categories without thinking. We use labels, and these labels come with certain ideas and expectations. For example, if someone is labeled "Baby Boomer," people expect certain things from them. Language plays a big role in creating these identities.

We give others identity labels, and they reflect back to us how they see us. This can affect how we see ourselves. If we constantly hear negative things about ourselves, we might start to believe them. This is especially important for teachers, who can influence how students see themselves.

We need to help students question how they are labeled by society. We need to help them move from being passive recipients of labels to being active in defining themselves.

### **Creating the "Other"**

To understand identity, we must also understand the "Other." This means that to define ourselves, we need to define what we are not.

An old story says that humans were once whole, but the gods split them in half. Now, we are always looking for our other half.

When we identify ourselves, we also identify what is not us. We compare ourselves to others along different lines, like male/female, black/white, etc. These lines are always changing, and identity is never fixed.

## **The Center and the Margin**

In society, one side of these lines is often seen as the "Center," or the dominant group. The other side is the "Margin," or the less powerful group. The Center creates the rules and ideas.

The Center often fears the Margin, because it represents what is different and unknown. This fear leads to discrimination.

The line between the Center and the Margin is not always clear. People can belong to both. New identities can emerge in these blurred spaces.

We need new words to describe these new identities. Language becomes a battleground. We must create our own identities, because there are no ready-made ones.

Our identity changes over time. We have many different identities within us.

## **The Importance of Understanding Identity**

Understanding identity is a complex but important task. We need to understand ourselves and others. We need to see all parts of ourselves as connected.

As Walt Whitman said, we can hold different and conflicting ideas within ourselves.





## **‘The peer group is the most influential agent of socialisation in shaping gender identity.’ Explain this view.**

**CAMBRIDGE A level and AS level October/November 2022.**

### **The Influence of Peer Groups on Gender Identity**

This essay argues that the peer group is a profoundly influential agent of socialisation, playing a pivotal role in shaping gender identity. While other agents like family and education contribute, the intense, everyday interactions within peer groups, particularly during adolescence, make them powerful forces in shaping how young people understand and express their gender.

### **Peer Pressure and Conformity**

A key aspect of the peer group's influence is the pressure to conform. Individuals, particularly during the formative adolescent years, are acutely aware of their social standing and seek acceptance. This desire to fit in can lead them to adopt behaviours and attitudes considered "normal" within their peer group, even if these contradict their personal beliefs or family influences. **For example, boys might feel pressured to participate in traditionally masculine activities, even if they have no genuine interest, to avoid being ostracized or labelled as different.** This pressure can be particularly strong for individuals who do not conform to traditional gender

norms, potentially leading to feelings of isolation or the need to conceal aspects of their identity.

### **Gender Subcultures and Reinforcement**

Furthermore, peer groups often develop distinct gender subcultures, with their own sets of norms, values, and behaviours. These subcultures can further reinforce specific gendered identities. **For instance, research by McRobbie (1991) on "bedroom culture" highlighted how girls, in their private spaces, engaged in activities like reading magazines and discussing boys, reinforcing traditional notions of femininity.** Similarly, boys' friendship groups might revolve around sports or video games, solidifying stereotypical notions of masculinity.

### **Social Control and Sanctions**

The influence of peer groups is also exerted through mechanisms of social control. **Lees (1986) illustrated how girls use informal sanctions, such as gossip and ridicule, to police each other's behaviour, particularly concerning appearances and relationships with boys .** This constant scrutiny and potential for negative judgment can lead individuals to suppress aspects of their identity that deviate from the group's norms. Conversely, positive reinforcement from peers for conforming to gender expectations can further solidify these behaviours.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, while acknowledging the role of other agents, the peer group emerges as a particularly potent force in shaping gender identity. The pressure to conform, the reinforcement of gendered norms within peer subcultures, and the mechanisms of social control all contribute to how individuals understand and express their gender. As individuals navigate the complex landscape of adolescence, seeking acceptance and belonging, the peer group exerts a significant influence on their developing sense of self, shaping not only their social interactions but also their understanding of who they are within the broader social fabric.

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# The Impact of Social Media on Gender Identity

*How the changing social media landscape has altered the way people think about the subject of Gender Identity*

By Oliver Luck, Ella Ross and Rocco Masutti

(Adapted from original text: <https://otago.shorthandstories.com/the-impact-of-social-media-on-gender-identity/index.html> )

## How Social Media Changes Gender Identity

We all know that technology and social media have changed a lot since the early 2000s. At the same time, how people think about and show their gender has also changed. We want to see how social media, and all the different choices people have now, affect how people show their gender to the world. And we want to see how this is different from the past.

### 2002-2009

#### *The formative years of Social Media*



This era marked the start of mass amounts of people engaging with online communities and expressing themselves digitally, impacting various aspects of identity formation, including gender.

## **MySpace**

MySpace was one of the first big social media sites. It started in 2003. People could show their interests and make their own online identity. This was the first time many people could show who they were online and find a community.

In the beginning, early social media often made traditional ideas about gender stronger. Because everything was online, these ideas were more visible.

For example, research said that social media gives young adults chances to show who they might become. But it also puts more pressure on girls to look like objects, and made people compare themselves to others more, which can be bad for how they see themselves.

## **Facebook**

Then came Facebook. Facebook also used profiles where people shared a lot about themselves. Things like if they were in a relationship and other personal details were important for Facebook to grow.

Facebook built on what MySpace started. It gave people a place to control how they looked to others, maybe more than they could in real life. (Khoshsabk & Southcott, 2019). But like on MySpace in the early 2000s, this didn't always help people show their true selves. Instead, it often made them follow common gender stereotypes.

## **Twitter (now X)**

Twitter, now called X, took sharing to a new level. Instead of just sharing parts of your life, people were encouraged to share everything they were thinking.

Twitter has often been a more negative place than other social media sites. This means that when people shared their feelings about their gender, they often got negative responses. This continued the trend from early social media, where it showed the problems of the society around it, and focused on old ideas about gender.

Even now, Twitter/X has grown, but "there are more ways to have arguments and separate people, maybe because of how the computer programs work." This can "make it harder to have open and inclusive conversations, especially about gender." (Peña-Fernández et al., 2023)

Even though the first social media sites had some problems with how they affected gender identity, they also created a place where people could talk about these things on a large scale.

## **2010-2016**

### **Instagram**

***Released in 2010 and an overnight phenomenon, Instagram has evolved into a platform that gives people the opportunity to create a brand for themselves and influence others.***

For example, Andrew Tate uses Instagram to share his ideas about gender. He says bad things about women. He tries to tell people how men and women should act. He uses old, unfair ideas about gender to become famous and influence people. Many people follow him, which shows how powerful Instagram can be.

But Instagram also helps people. People can share their lives and ideas. People who feel lost or scared can find others like them. This creates good communities, like the LGBTQIA+ community. This community helps people who have problems with their gender identity. Instagram helps people be themselves and not hide who they are. Companies like Disney also use Instagram to support these communities.

However, Instagram also lets people share any opinion, and this includes bad opinions. People can be mean and discriminate against others, especially people in the LGBTQIA+ communities. Some of these communities even start to be mean to each other because of the bad things they hear.

Some people think that ideas about gender have gone too far. For example, the Instagram user @lesbiansnowwhite talks about using "neo-pronouns," which means identifying with an object instead of a gender. People leave comments like, "Can we just be normal?" or "This is nonsense." This shows that people have different opinions about these ideas, and it can create confusion and arguments about what is acceptable.

## 2017 – Now

### The Rise of short form content and #Movements

#### TikTok

For LGBTQ+ creators who want to meet people like and show who they are, TikTok is a good place. TikTok lets people make creative videos, so they can explore gender identity in many ways. TikTok's computer program shows videos to lots of people. This means videos about gender can reach new people who want to learn. This helps more people understand and see different gender identities. It also helps people who are still figuring out their gender to connect with others. TikTok started as Musical.ly in 2017 and became very popular with short videos. Now, it's one of the biggest social media sites.

Many people use social media. Reports say 5 billion people use it regularly. Popular sites are Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. These sites help people talk about gender identity and support each other. People feel more comfortable talking about LGBTQ+ topics now than in the past. By showing many different gender identities, these platforms are helping to celebrate diversity in our society.

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@Lesbiansnowwhite (IG handle)



# How Heavy Metal Fuels Indigenous Revival in Patagonia

An anthropologist plunges into the world of Patagonian heavy metal music in Argentina to explore how the genre relates to language and cultural revitalization.

By [ERIN WHEELER STREUSAND](#)

11 MAR 2025



Razzia, a Patagonian heavy metal band that features Indigenous themes and aesthetics, performs in the city of Neuquén, Argentina, in 2023.

I FIRST HEARD Patagonian heavy metal on a cold winter night in Esquel, Argentina. The song roared to life with guitar riffs and drumming resembling a U.S. or European thrash metal record. But around the 35-second mark, unfamiliar wind instruments grabbed my attention. When the vocals came in at just over the 1-minute mark, I was

surprised to hear that they were not in Spanish or English but rather the Indigenous Mapudungun language.

“Metal from here is a really beautiful fusion,” Patagonian music expert Rogelio “Lito” Calfunao shouted to me over the music playing in his recording studio. “I don’t know why metal goes so well with Patagonian folklore. Because of the lyrics, because of the rebellion, because of the power ... I love this group because they are a clear example of the fusion of metal with ancestral heritage.”

As an anthropologist who studies Indigenous music and language revitalization, I had traveled to Esquel to do just that. This city of 37,000 in Argentina’s Chubut province entered my radar after I connected with Calfunao via his YouTube page Lito Calfunao en Patagonia. A renowned radio operator and promotor of all genres of Patagonian music, Calfunao invited me to Esquel and to Sala Patagón, the recording studio he runs with his wife, Mara Agañarez.

Partway through our conversation on Indigenous history, music, and language, Calfunao lit up when he discovered that we were both metalheads. He eagerly opened his laptop to play a track he recorded two years prior by Awkan, a Patagonian metal band of Indigenous Mapuche origin.

That night in Sala Patagón stuck with me as my dissertation research took shape. I had initially planned to focus on Indigenous language revitalization in public schools, but it soon became clear that spaces like Calfunao’s recording studio carried just as much value for Patagonians looking to reconnect with Indigenous languages and cultures. Specifically, I began to wonder how nontraditional genres like heavy metal music might relate to language revitalization. What could heavy metal provide for those looking to reconnect with their Indigenous heritage in Patagonia today?

I plunged into the world of Patagonian metal to find out.

## **INDIGENOUS SELF-RECOGNITION IN ARGENTINA**

The original peoples of the region today known as Argentine Patagonia include the Mapuche, Tehuelche, and Selk’nam, and their ancestors. The earliest European contact occurred during Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan’s voyage in the early 16th century, but the lands of Patagonia remained fairly free of outside control until the second half of the 19th century.

Through the violent military campaign known as the “Conquest of the Desert,” the Argentine government gained control over the southern portion of the continent, killing and displacing Indigenous peoples and moving to assimilate the rest through

educational and religious initiatives. The national government also incentivized European settlement on these lands, with the goal of economically and ethnically incorporating these territories into the new Argentine nation-state.

In the years that followed, a mainstream historical narrative emerged that represented Argentina as a White nation of European immigrants with no remaining Indigenous peoples. This narrative of Whiteness and of Argentina as the “Europe” of South America persists today, as highlighted in a 2021 speech by then Argentine President Alberto Fernández. “The Mexicans came from the Indians, the Brazilians came from the jungle, but us Argentines came from boats. And they were boats that came from Europe,” Fernández claimed.



Mapuche shamans, or *machis*, play the traditional *kultrun* drum in 1900. The drum has become a symbol used by Patagonian metal bands to signify a connection to Indigenous issues.

Public Domain/[Wikimedia Commons](#)

While Fernández received widespread criticism for this statement, I regularly encountered this belief from Argentines when explaining my research topic. Mapuche people in particular must deal with narratives that associate the Mapuche with neighboring Chile and incorrectly claim that Mapuche people are not native to what is today Argentina. Mapuche communities aiming to reclaim ancestral territories have routinely clashed with Argentine police, the National Parks Service, and elite landowners. Although the Mapuche have suffered the brunt of the resulting violence, some outsiders have come to view them as threatening “terrorists” pursuing inauthentic land claims.

Indigenous musicians, organizers, and community members must deal with these constant challenges when pursuing political struggles and personal revitalization journeys. Despite this, Argentine Patagonians are increasingly embracing their Indigenous heritage. They refer to this journey as a process of *autoreconocimiento*, or “self-recognition.” As Esquel-based Mapuche musician Amutuy describes it:

“Today the history of the Native peoples, the history especially of the Mapuche people, is developing in a different way thanks to the new generations who try to maintain the history, to maintain the memory of the many things that have happened to us. I have been in this process of self-recognition for several years. And it never ends.”

### **PATAGONIAN HEAVY METAL AND INDIGENEITY**

Mapuche and other Indigenous musicians in Argentina have drawn on heavy metal to express and reconnect with their Indigenous heritage.

Heavy metal first arrived in Argentina in the 1980s, as bands like V8 drew inspiration from heavy metal scenes in the U.S. and the U.K. Metal was initially centered in the capital of Buenos Aires, but as bands began to tour the Argentine interior, they introduced metal to new regions, including Patagonia. During my fieldwork, I learned that working-class Patagonian musicians found heavy metal to be a powerful way to articulate their discontent with economic struggle, out-of-touch governments, Indigenous erasure, and the isolation of their region from the rest of the country.

Since the late 1990s, a unique genre known as *metal patagón*, or Patagonian metal, has emerged in southern Argentina that brings together Argentine national metal with folklore music from the Patagonia region. Early Patagonian metal bands such as Aonikenk, Razzia, and Werken established the importance of Indigenous peoples to Patagonian history and culture in their music. The bands played distinct styles of metal but shared a commitment to Indigenous themes and aesthetics in their lyrics and presentation.

## Different types of identity

### *Individual or personal identity*

Woodward (2000) suggests that individual identity is concerned with the question 'Who am I?' – how individuals define themselves, what is important and matters to them, how they see themselves as individuals different from other people, and the things that give them their own unique personal or individual characteristics. Their name, their passport, their National Insurance number, their fingerprints, their DNA, their birth certificate and their signature are some obvious examples of these, as well as people's personal histories, friends and relationships and their own understanding of who they really are as individuals: their own self-concept of the 'inner me', or 'I', as Mead referred to it.

### *Social identity*

Social identity offers little choice and defines individuals in relation to the social groups with which they are identified and to which they belong, and how they differ from other social groups and individuals. Such groups might include men and women, ethnic groups, or national groups like the English, Scots or Welsh. The formation of social identities may also arise from the characteristics associated with the social roles that people play. For example, the identities and the related behaviour that might be expected of them when playing their social roles as mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, students or workers, or as members of social groups like students, males or females, Muslims or Sikhs, gays, lesbians or heterosexuals, or Welsh or Scottish.

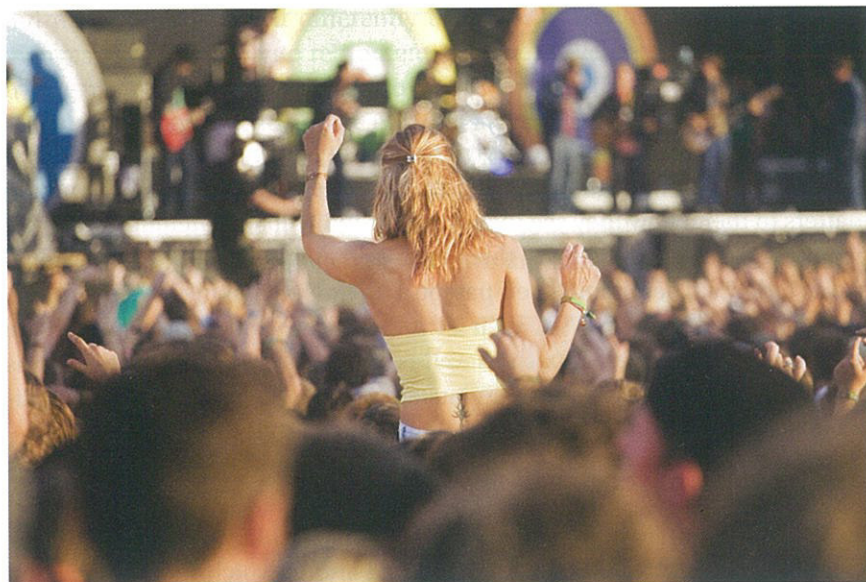
### *Collective identity*

A collective identity is an identity shared by a social group, and involves elements of both personal and social identities, but differs from both as it involves considerable elements of choice by individuals in that they actively choose to identify with a group and adopt the identity associated with it. For example, while social identities like gender, ethnicity or nationality are largely defined by others and individuals have only limited choice in whether or not to adopt them, being identified as a football or rock music fan, a Goth, a gang member, a Hell's Angel, a feminist, an eco-warrior protecting the environment, an anti-war, animal rights or Labour Party activist is almost completely a matter of personal choice.

### *Multiple identities*

The idea of multiple identities simply means that people have several identities, rather than just one. Individuals may draw on more than one source of identity, such as identities formed around their social class, and/or their ethnicity, their sexuality, their gender, their nationality and/or their age,





To what extent do you think going to festivals like Glastonbury is an important aspect of the identity of young people? What other groups or activities do young people engage with to form their collective identities?

etc., or a combination of all of them. Individuals may assert different 'selves' in different circumstances. For example, at home they may assert the identity of a good son or daughter or a good Muslim, at school or college they may assert their identity as a good student, in their personal relations as gay, in their peer group as a Goth, in their leisure activities as a sporty type or drinker, in their workplace as a good worker, or as primarily having an Asian Muslim identity in Britain, but a British identity while travelling abroad.

### *Stigmatized or 'spoiled' identities*

A **stigma** might be:

- a physical impairment, like being blind, losing the use of lower limbs, or having an illness like AIDS or a sexually-transmitted disease
- a social characteristic, like being mentally ill, a sex offender, a criminal or a child abuser.

Goffman (1990) said a **stigmatized identity** is an identity that is in some way undesirable or demeaning, excluding people from full acceptance in society. The disabled, for example, are often said to have a stigmatized identity in a society which places a high premium on bodily perfection. Those with stigmatized identities can face serious social consequences, with others treating them with contempt, poking fun at them, denying them proper medical treatment (as happens with some older people and the disabled), or refusing them employment (as with former prisoners, the mentally ill or the elderly). Having a stigmatized identity nearly always means that any attempts made

A **stigma** is any undesirable physical or social characteristic that is seen as abnormal or unusual in some way, that is seen as demeaning and stops an individual being fully accepted by society. A **stigmatized identity** is an identity that is in some way undesirable or demeaning, and excludes people from full acceptance in society.