



SOCIAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: A STUDY AN GROUP AFFILIATION AND INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL STATUS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DYNAMICS

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Abstract

This study examines social identity construction in contemporary society using a qualitative literature review. It investigates two primary dimensions: the process of group affiliation and the impact of social status and environmental dynamics on self-identity. The findings indicate that group affiliation provides both social acceptance and a cognitive framework for interpreting personal experiences. Individuals manage multiple affiliations through segmentation or integration strategies to maintain identity coherence. Social status shapes identity via early-childhood cognitive schemas and self-presentation styles, though social mobility often introduces tension between one's origins and new positions. Furthermore, environmental shifts including urbanization, digital technology, and the erosion of traditional institutional authority create significant uncertainty, impacting identity stability. The study concludes that identity construction is a relational, dialogical process where individuals and their environments continuously influence one another. It shifts theoretical focus toward the dialectical interaction between agency and structure. Practically, the research highlights the necessity for education, counseling, and community development interventions that are sensitive to the increasing complexity of contemporary identity.

Keywords: identity construction, group affiliation, social status, environmental dynamics, contemporary society, self-identity, social change

Introduction

The question of who a person is has become a central focus in social studies throughout the history of human civilization. Humans, as social beings, never live in absolute isolation; every individual is constantly within a web of relations with others, groups, and broader social structures. It is within this web of relations that self-identity begins to form, not as a ready-made entity, but as something that is continuously negotiated, maintained, and occasionally revised (Cheshmehzangi, 2020). This process of identity formation never takes place in a vacuum but is always bound to a specific time and place. We must realize that the smallest environment, such as the family, plays a major role in shaping an individual's initial character (Fajar et al., 2021). Every individual enters a world that already possesses established social categorizations, labeling, and hierarchies before they are born. However, they do not merely receive these categorizations passively. Through daily interactions, through the responses of others toward them, and through reflection on life experiences, they actively construct an understanding of who they are, which groups serve as their footing, and how they are positioned within the larger social order. This dynamic becomes increasingly complex when contemporary society is characterized by massive population movements, cultural mixing, and the erosion of traditional boundaries that once served as the primary references in identity formation (Santoso, 2006).

Social changes taking place at an unprecedented speed have shaken the foundations of identity that were once considered solid (Vignoles, 2017). Religious affiliations, kinship ties, and social class loyalties, which in the past provided a relatively stable framework for individuals to define themselves, now face challenges from various directions. Social problems emerging in society, such as early marriage, often disrupt economic stability and mental well-being, leading to identity crises for those involved (Aliyah et al., 2023). The emergence of digital spaces allows individuals to be part of various virtual communities that are not bound by geographical borders, enabling someone to simultaneously belong to multiple groups with different values and norms. This condition opens up possibilities for individuals to explore various versions of themselves, but at the same time, it creates vulnerability because no single affiliation can provide a complete sense of certainty. In such a situation, the construction of identity can no

longer be understood as a final achievement, but rather as a project that must be continuously worked on throughout life. An individual's experience in choosing group affiliations, in responding to others' assessments of their social status, and in adapting to the demands of an ever-changing environment becomes the primary material for a narrative of the self that is constantly being composed and edited.

Social status, as one of the important elements in identity construction, has a powerful influence on how a person perceives themselves and how others perceive them (Scheuringer, 2016). In a hierarchically structured society, one's position in the social class arrangement not only determines access to material resources but also shapes a fundamental self-awareness. How a person behaves in the workplace or within an organization is also heavily influenced by how they perceive their own social position (Darmawan, 2013). Someone placed in a low position within the social hierarchy often internalizes negative assessments from their environment, such that the self-image formed is distorted by stigma and marginalization. Conversely, those in high positions not only enjoy material advantages but also gain social recognition that strengthens their sense of self-worth. However, social status is not something static. Vertical mobility made possible in modern society whether through education, occupation, or marriage creates a dynamic where identity associated with status must be constantly renegotiated. This is clearly visible in the differences in lifestyle and perspectives between people living in major cities and those in rural areas (Amri & Khayru, 2021). An individual experiencing an increase in status may have to leave their old group affiliations and learn to adapt to the norms of their new group, while those experiencing a decline in status face the challenge of maintaining self-worth amidst unwanted changes in social position.

Group affiliation is another dimension that is no less important in the construction of identity (Mareková, 2020). Humans instinctively seek connection with others, and the group becomes a vessel where the need for a sense of belonging can be fulfilled. Groups provide individuals with interpretive frameworks to understand the world, standards to evaluate behavior, and much-needed sources of emotional support. However, group affiliation also brings the consequence of distinguishing between "us" and

"them." Often, an overly strong sense of belonging to a specific group can trigger excessive nationalism and isolation from other groups (Fariz, 2021). This process of social categorization, which gives birth to group identity, often serves as the basis for the formation of prejudice and discrimination against out-groups. In contemporary multicultural societies, individuals are faced with increasingly diverse choices regarding which groups to use as an identity reference. Someone can identify themselves based on ethnicity, religion, profession, hobby communities, political orientation, or a combination of various affiliations. On the other hand, women often face challenges in dividing their time between their professional identities and household responsibilities (Fauzi, 2023). This diversity of choices provides both freedom and a burden, as individuals are responsible for choosing and maintaining affiliations that align with the self-image they wish to build. This selection process not infrequently causes internal conflict when one affiliation demands loyalty that conflicts with another, requiring the individual to work hard to integrate these various affiliations into a single coherent identity.

The constantly changing social environment adds a layer of complexity to the process of identity construction (Omelaenko, 2018). When the prevailing norms in society undergo a shift, individuals must make adjustments to the understanding of themselves that they previously considered established. Changes in values regarding gender, for example, have forced many to re-examine old assumptions about what it means to be male or female in contemporary society. This change is also evident in how the role of women in determining more environmentally friendly household consumption is increasingly recognized (Halizah & Nuraini, 2021). Similarly, with changes in economic structures shifting traditional forms of work, many individuals lose the professional identity that has been their primary source of self-meaning. In such situations of uncertainty, identity can no longer be understood as an automatic inheritance received from family or community, but rather as something that must be consciously chosen and maintained through a series of performative actions. Every choice of clothing, every statement on social media, and every displayed affiliation becomes material for a self-presentation deliberately designed to build a certain impression in the eyes of others. The process of identity construction in contemporary society is

thus a highly reflective and conscious process, where individuals constantly monitor and adjust their self-presentation based on the feedback received from their social environment.

In contemporary society characterized by fragmentation and plurality of values, a fundamental question arises regarding how individuals can build a coherent identity when faced with various offers of affiliation that are often contradictory (Carr, 2021). Someone can simultaneously be part of a conservative religious community, a secular workplace, and a hobby group with values different from both. The tension between these various affiliations raises the question of which affiliation should serve as the primary reference in forming self-identity. For disadvantaged groups, such as street children, this identity formation process is much more difficult due to the weakness of social protection systems for them (Aidan Bin Abdullah, 2021). Should an individual choose one dominant affiliation and suppress the others, or instead embrace all those affiliations in a fluid and situational identity configuration? Furthermore, when various affiliations demand exclusive loyalty, the individual faces the risk of alienation from groups whose demands they cannot fulfill. This condition is exacerbated by social expectations that require individuals to display identity consistency in the public eye, while their internal reality is colored by the tug-of-war between different affiliations. The accumulation of these pressures produces a significant psychological burden, where the individual is constantly in a state of alertness toward the possibility of a mismatch between the identity displayed and the expectations of the various reference groups. This issue becomes even more complex when digital technology allows every trace of identity displayed in public spaces to be recorded permanently, so that mistakes in identity management can have long-term consequences that are difficult to rectify.

Another no less important issue relates to the discrepancy between the identity constructed by an individual and the recognition provided by their social environment. An individual may have built an understanding of themselves as a member of a specific social group, yet the surrounding environment continuously places them in a different category. This condition occurs most vividly in individuals experiencing vertical social mobility, where their background of origin often overshadows their new

status. Someone from a poor family who successfully achieves a respectable professional position may still be treated in a way that recalls their origins by those who know their background. Conversely, those from affluent families who experience economic decline often struggle to maintain recognition of their old social status amidst unsupportive material changes. This mismatch between the identity claimed and the identity assigned by others creates a very burdensome experience, as identity is not only constructed individually but must also be collectively ratified (Archer, 2021). When ratification is not granted, the individual is forced to perform intensive identity work, either by altering their identity claims to match the available recognition or by continuously fighting for the recognition of the identity they believe in. In a society that pays close attention to status markers such as education, occupation, and lifestyle, the struggle to gain recognition for a constructed identity becomes an inseparable part of daily life experience.

The study of social identity construction becomes highly relevant amidst the strengthening social polarization occurring in various parts of the world. The tendency of society to divide into opposing camps, whether based on political affiliation, religion, or ethnicity, shows that group identity has become a highly decisive factor in shaping how one views social reality. In situations of intense polarization, identity is no longer merely a tool for an individual to understand themselves, but also a primary determinant in distinguishing who is a friend and who is a foe (Mason et al., 2021). The process of identity construction under such conditions tends to harden, where it becomes increasingly difficult for individuals to maintain fluid or complex identities due to the pressure to display undivided loyalty to a single reference group. A better understanding of how identity is built and maintained in these polarized conditions is an urgent necessity, both to understand the dynamics of social conflict and to design interventions that can reduce tension. Without adequate understanding, efforts to bridge differences between groups will struggle to succeed because they do not touch the identity-based roots of the problem. Therefore, the study of social identity construction is not merely an academic interest; it carries broad practical implications for efforts to build social cohesion in the midst of a fragmented society.

The development of digital technology and social media has fundamentally changed the landscape in which identity is built and maintained. Digital spaces provide platforms for individuals to display versions of themselves that may differ from the identity they show in face-to-face interactions. Nowadays, many people try to look perfect on social media in order to gain recognition and certain benefits (Hariani & Mardikaningsih, 2022). A person can have multiple social media accounts with different personas, each intended for a different audience. The flexibility offered by these digital spaces opens up new possibilities for identity exploration, but also creates new challenges in the form of pressure to constantly produce content that maintains the self-image already established. Furthermore, digital platform algorithms tend to strengthen existing affiliations by displaying content that matches user preferences, thereby creating echo chambers that reinforce group identity while simultaneously reducing exposure to different perspectives (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023). Under these conditions, the process of identity construction becomes increasingly confined within isolated digital silos, reducing the likelihood of cross-group encounters that could soften tensions. In conclusion, understanding identity today requires open-mindedness because our identity will always change over time and with technological developments. The study of identity construction in the digital era is essential to understanding how technology shapes not only how individuals perceive themselves, but also how they perceive other different groups. Without this understanding, it will be difficult to develop adequate digital literacy that can help individuals navigate the complexity of identity formation in digital spaces without falling into deeper polarization.

This research aims to systematically analyze the process of social identity construction in contemporary society, focusing on two main dimensions: the mechanism of group affiliation and the influence of social status and environmental dynamics on the formation of self-identity. The theoretical contribution of this research is to formulate a conceptual framework that maps how individuals navigate various affiliation offers available in modern society and integrate them into a coherent self-understanding, as well as how changes in social position and environment affect the stability and flexibility of identity. Practically, the results of this study are expected to provide a deeper understanding of identity dynamics

for practitioners working in the fields of education, counseling, and community development, so they can design approaches that are more sensitive to the complexities of identity faced by individuals in an ever-changing contemporary society.

Method

This research utilizes a library research approach with a qualitative design aimed at exploring and synthesizing various theories and empirical findings regarding the construction of social identity. The selection of this method is based on the characteristics of the topic, which requires an in-depth investigation of concepts that have developed within the disciplines of sociology, social psychology, and anthropology. As stated by Fink (2010), library research in the social sciences serves to identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing research results to build a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. In this study, the primary data sources consist of books, scientific journal articles, and dissertations discussing social identity, self-formation, group dynamics, and contemporary social change. The data collection process was conducted through systematic searches of academic databases using a combination of relevant keywords. Each identified source was then evaluated for credibility through an assessment of the publisher's reputation, the peer review process, and the consistency of the argumentation with findings from other sources. Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2008) emphasize that good library research requires the ability to map ongoing scholarly conversations and find the appropriate position for the new contributions to be presented.

Data analysis in this study uses the thematic analysis method developed by Boyatzis (1998), which allows researchers to identify recurring patterns in the literature and organize them into meaningful themes. The analytical stage began with open coding of all collected library materials, followed by the grouping of codes with similar meanings into more abstract categories, and concluded with the formulation of major themes that answer the research questions. This approach enables the researcher not merely to summarize what others have written, but also to perform a critical synthesis that generates new understanding regarding the construction of social identity. To maintain the validity of the findings, this research applies a source triangulation strategy by comparing findings

from literature with diverse disciplinary backgrounds, theoretical traditions, and geographical contexts. Additionally, the researcher conducted searches for literature with differing or opposing perspectives to ensure that the resulting conclusions were not biased due to an overly narrow selection of sources. The entire analytical process was systematically documented so that every step can be traced back by other researchers wishing to conduct verification or replication.

Result and Discussion

Group Affiliation Processes and the Meaning of Self-Identity in Contemporary Society

The process of group affiliation is the primary entry point for individuals to begin building an understanding of who they are (Amini, 2020). From the beginning of life, humans never exist in a state without groups; the family, the neighborhood, and the immediate community become the first groups to provide labels and categories that shape self-awareness. Throughout the journey of life, problems often arise within the family that require outside assistance so that relationships between members remain harmonious (Zahid et al., 2021). However, what distinguishes contemporary society from previous eras is that individuals are no longer permanently tied to the groups assigned at birth. Geographical mobility, widespread access to information, and the diversity of available life choices create conditions where group affiliation becomes something chosen consciously, rather than merely accepted as destiny. Someone who grows up in a family with conservative values may choose to join a more progressive community when they begin to find values that are more suited to themselves. These life choices are also influenced by how societal views on the roles of men and women are now beginning to change along with the times (Negara & Khayru, 2022). This ability to choose carries significant consequences for how identity is interpreted. Identity is no longer understood as something discovered, but as something constructed through a series of deliberate affiliation decisions.

In choosing an affiliation group, individuals do not merely seek a place where they can be accepted, but also look for a group capable of providing an adequate interpretive framework for their life experiences (Amini, 2020). Groups provide the language to describe reality,

categories to classify experiences, and collective narratives that give meaning to an individual's life journey. A person who joins an environmental activist community, for example, not only gains new friends but also acquires a new perspective on the relationship between humans and nature. The active involvement of citizens in protecting the environment is usually supported by strong cooperation among fellow community members (Zulkarnain et al., 2021). The process of internalizing this interpretive framework from the group takes place gradually through routine interaction, observation of other members, and participation in shared rituals and practices. In fact, the environmental care values learned from the group can influence a person's habits in choosing more environmentally friendly products (Mardikaningsih et al., 2022). The more intense an individual's involvement in a group, the more strongly that interpretive framework shapes how they understand themselves and their world.

The complexity of group affiliation in contemporary society lies in the fact that individuals generally do not belong to just one group, but to several groups simultaneously (Rayevska et al., 2021). An individual can be a member of a nuclear family, a religious community member, a professional organization member, a hobby group member, and a member of various virtual communities on social media. Current digital technology indeed makes it very easy for young people to interact and search for new information through various platforms on the internet (Kurniawan et al., 2021). Each of these groups brings different values, norms, and demands, which sometimes even contradict one another. This condition creates a challenge for individuals to integrate these various affiliations into a single coherent identity. As stated by Hogg and Vaughan (2018), social identity theory explains that individuals have a tendency to categorize themselves into various social groups, and each category contributes to the formation of the overall self-concept.

Some people choose a segmentation strategy, where they display different identities in different contexts (Petrov, 2021). In the workplace, they emphasize their professional identity; in the family environment, they highlight their identity as parents or children; in hobby communities, they feature other aspects of themselves. This segmentation strategy allows individuals to maintain diverse affiliations without having to face conflicts

directly. However, in the world of work, a person's satisfaction with their job often depends on their experiences and how their career develops (Sinambela et al., 2023). This strategy also creates its own burden because individuals must constantly monitor the context and adjust their self-presentation to match the expectations of the relevant group. According to Côté (2016), this practice of identity segmentation can result in what is called identity strain, a psychological condition that arises when individuals feel exhausted because they must continuously adapt to the demands of different roles. If left unaddressed for too long, this emotional exhaustion can interfere with a person's performance, especially for those working in the public service sector (Khayru & Darmawan, 2023). Failure to make these adjustments can lead to inconsistencies that trigger negative assessments from the respective groups.

Conversely, other individuals choose an integration strategy, which is the effort to unite various affiliations into a more inclusive identity narrative (Hornung, 2022). This strategy requires more intensive cognitive work because the individual must find a common thread that connects the seemingly conflicting values of different affiliation groups. For example, someone who is simultaneously a scientist and a devout religious believer must develop an understanding capable of reconciling scientific thinking with religious beliefs without sacrificing either one. This integration process often produces a more complex and rich identity, yet it is also more vulnerable to challenges because its coherence depends on the individual's ability to continuously maintain the narrative that unites these various elements.

Group affiliation also functions as a source of validation for the identity claims put forward by individuals (Gardner & Schultz, 2017). A person may claim to be an artist, but that claim will not be socially recognized if it is not validated by a group acknowledged to have authority in the field of art. Validation from an affiliation group provides the individual with a sense that the identity they have built is legitimate and recognized by the social world. This validation process takes place in various forms, ranging from the formal awarding of degrees or certifications to informal recognition such as praise, awards, or simple acceptance as a full member of the group. When validation is not obtained, the individual experiences an identity crisis where they question whether

the identity they have built truly aligns with reality. This search for validation shows that identity is not a purely personal matter, but always involves negotiation with a social world that has its own standards and criteria for what is considered a valid and worthy identity.

The process of group affiliation is never detached from the power dynamics that surround it. Every group has an internal hierarchy that determines who possesses the authority to define what it means to be a "good" member of the group (Vignoles, 2017). In highly structured groups such as religious organizations or political parties, the definition of a member's identity tends to be more rigid and strictly monitored by existing authorities. Members who deviate from these definitions risk being expelled or, at the very least, placed in a marginal position. Conversely, looser groups like hobby communities or friendship circles provide more significant space for individuals to define the meaning of their own membership. This shows that everyone has different opportunities in determining their roles, including the involvement of women in human resource management practices which are increasingly developing today (Infante & Darmawan, 2022). An individual's choice to join a more rigid or a looser group reflects their need for certainty versus their need for autonomy in the identity construction process. Groups with rigid identity definitions offer the benefit of clarity regarding what is expected of a member, thereby reducing potentially burdensome ambiguity. However, this clarity is paid for with a reduced space to express one's uniqueness. On the other hand, groups with loose definitions offer greater freedom but also demand that individuals be more active in defining for themselves what it means to be a member, which can become a burden for those who desire certainty.

Social media has fundamentally changed how individuals engage in group affiliation and how those affiliations are displayed. Within digital platforms, group membership becomes more visible and comparable by the public (Zontea, 2010). A person can quickly demonstrate their political affiliation through shared posts, their religious affiliation through liked content, and their lifestyle affiliation through uploaded photos. This condition is in line with changing times where the use of electronic mail or email remains highly relevant in today's digital marketing communication mix to reach a broader audience (Sinambela &

Darmawan, 2021). This high visibility ensures that group affiliation is no longer a private matter known only to a limited circle, but becomes a part of a self-presentation accessible to anyone. The consequence of this visibility is the increased pressure to manage the impressions created by the displayed affiliations. Someone who shows affiliation with a particular group must be prepared to receive judgment from others based on that affiliation, including the possibility of being stigmatized if the affiliation is considered controversial by some. On the other hand, high visibility also opens opportunities for individuals to discover new groups they previously did not know. Digital platform algorithms often recommend content and communities based on user activity, making it easier for individuals to find groups that match their interests and values. However, this ease of information access is sometimes still hindered by inequalities in educational access in developing countries, which presents its own challenge for societal progress (Rojak & Khayru, 2022). This convenience accelerates the process of affiliation exploration but can also trap individuals in a confirmation loop where they are constantly exposed to views that reinforce existing affiliations without ever being exposed to different perspectives.

The meaning an individual assigns to their group affiliation is also heavily influenced by how that group is perceived by the broader society (Baharudin & Ernawati, 2019). Joining a high-prestige group provides individuals with a sense of pride and an increase in self-esteem, while joining a stigmatized group can instead cause significant psychological burdens. This difficult social situation is often exacerbated by the phenomena of urbanization and social inequality, which make efforts to build cohesion in urban environments more challenging (Mardikaningsih, 2021). In this situation, individuals often develop various strategies to manage the stigma attached to their group affiliation. Some choose to hide that affiliation from the public, displaying it only in safe environments. Others instead openly display the affiliation as a form of resistance against stigma and an effort to normalize marginalized identities. Another strategy involves building an alternative narrative that reframes the stigmatized group as one that possesses moral advantages compared to mainstream groups. In addition to identity issues, people in densely populated areas also often have to struggle with food

vulnerability that threatens the welfare of poor households (Mahmudah, 2021). This meaning-making process shows that group affiliation does not have a fixed meaning inherent to the group itself, but is always reinterpreted by the individual based on their position in the social structure and the resources they possess to face stigma. Thus, identity construction through group affiliation always involves a political dimension, as the meaning attached to a group and how an individual positions themselves toward that meaning is always linked to the distribution of power and prestige in society.

Changes in group affiliation over time are also an inseparable part of the identity construction process. Individuals are not static; as they age, gain more experience, and shift their life priorities, affiliations that were once considered important may lose their meaning, while new affiliations emerge to replace them (Durante, 2017). The change of affiliation often does not occur smoothly, as leaving a group that has long been a part of one's self-identity can cause feelings of loss and disorientation. In these difficult transition periods, social support is crucial, especially considering how societal views on domestic violence can affect the mental health and recovery process of its victims (Issalillah & Khayru, 2021). Some individuals experience what is called a crisis identity transition, where the period between leaving an old group and finding a new one is filled with confusion about who they truly are. However, for others, the change in affiliation is experienced as a liberating growth process, where they are able to release affiliations that have been limiting them and find groups that are more aligned with their true selves. The subjective experience of changing affiliations is highly diverse and depends heavily on the conditions under which the change occurs. Changes chosen consciously and intentionally tend to be experienced more positively compared to changes forced by circumstances, such as a breakdown in relationships or expulsion from a group. In all cases, an individual's ability to narrate their change of affiliation as part of a coherent life story becomes a vital factor determining whether that change will strengthen or weaken their sense of self-worth.

In contemporary society, which is increasingly individualistic, a paradox emerges in the process of group affiliation (Jetten et al., 2018). On

one hand, individuals are increasingly free to choose groups according to personal preferences without being bound by tradition or family pressure. On the other hand, this freedom actually creates a new vulnerability in the form of uncertainty about whether the chosen group will remain relevant and stable in the long term. Virtual communities built around specific interests can quickly dissolve when those interests fade, or when the digital platforms hosting them change their algorithms or policies. This challenge becomes even more complex when we observe how the implementation of artificial intelligence and algorithmic bias are beginning to influence social transformation and the sense of justice within society (Mardikaningsih & Oluwatoyin, 2023). Identity-based groups, such as established ethnic or religious communities, do offer greater stability, but membership in them is often no longer automatic because individuals must consciously choose to identify with that group amidst the many available alternatives. This condition places individuals in a position where they must constantly perform "identity work" the reflexive activity of maintaining, strengthening, and occasionally revising the group affiliations that form part of their self-understanding. This identity work requires significant psychological energy, especially when individuals must face conflicts between various affiliations or when their chosen affiliations do not receive adequate validation from their social environment. The difficulty in determining one's life direction is also evident in how factors such as age, work experience, and gender can influence the duration of a job search after graduation (Khayru et al., 2022). The ability to perform this identity work effectively becomes a determining factor in whether a person can build a coherent and satisfying identity amidst the complexity of affiliation choices offered by contemporary society.

The process of group affiliation also has a deeply personal dimension, as ultimately the meaning an individual assigns to their membership in a group is always filtered through unique life experiences (Carter & Marony, 2021). Two people joining the same group can have very different experiences of what it means to be a member of that group. One person might find a deep sense of togetherness in their group that they have never felt elsewhere, while another might feel pressured by the conformity demanded by the group. In many cases, the burden felt by individuals is often related to gender roles, such as the phenomenon of career women

who must face a double burden from a feminist sociological perspective (Khairi, 2021). These differences in subjective experience show that identity is never fully determined by one's objective affiliation. There is always space for individuals to negotiate the meaning of their membership, to choose which aspects of the group identity to internalize and which to reject, and to develop personal interpretations of what it means to be part of that group. In this process, the individual is not merely a passive vessel receiving identity definitions from the group but actively shapes their identity through how they interpret their affiliation. The ability to maintain autonomy in this meaning-making process becomes crucial, especially when individuals join groups with strong pressures toward conformity. Those capable of maintaining a critical distance from their group without having to leave the affiliation tend to have more stable identities because they are less vulnerable to the fluctuations of the group's internal dynamics.

The process of identity construction through group affiliation is ultimately a dialogical process, involving a continuous exchange between the individual voice and the collective voice of the group. Individuals bring unique aspirations, values, and experiences into the group, while the group provides the interpretive frameworks and sources of validation that the individuals need (Kaufmann, 2011). This dialogue also provides space for the emancipation of women and the strengthening of their roles in the process of building a more inclusive society (Issalillah et al., 2022). In this dialogue, both influence each other. The group is not entirely static; it changes as new members join and bring different perspectives. Conversely, individuals do not fully determine their own identity without being influenced by the group. This long-term process results in an identity that is a synthesis of the individual's internal drives and the external demands of the group. In contemporary society, where individuals have access to a variety of groups with different interpretive frameworks, the identity dialogue becomes increasingly complex as individuals must integrate voices from various groups that are often out of sync. The ability to manage this multidirectional dialogue to choose what to internalize and what to reject, and to build coherence among the various influences received becomes a key competence that determines an individual's success in building a satisfying identity amidst the complexity of available affiliation choices.

The Influence of Social Status and Environmental Dynamics on the Construction of Self-Identity

Social status is one of the most fundamental elements that shapes how an individual views themselves and how they are viewed by others. In a hierarchically structured society, one's position in the social class arrangement not only determines access to material resources but also shapes a fundamental self-awareness from an early age. Children who grow up in families with high social status are directed from the start to understand themselves as part of a privileged group, while those who grow up in families with low status are confronted from the beginning with messages about limitations and subordinate positions. This early socialization process forms long-lasting cognitive schemas, which then become a frame of reference for individuals in interpreting subsequent experiences. Someone raised in an environment with low social status may internalize the belief that success is not something achievable by someone like them; thus, when they achieve success, they tend to attribute it to external factors such as luck (Scheuringer, 2016). Conversely, those raised in environments with high social status tend to have a greater sense of entitlement and view success as something natural. This difference in cognitive schemas shows that social status is not merely an external category but has permeated the structure of personality and shaped the way an individual gives meaning to themselves.

The influence of social status on identity construction is also evident in how individuals manage self-presentation before others (Kunnen et al., 2001). Someone from a low-status background often develops a high sensitivity to the judgments of others, especially from those perceived to have higher status. They learn to carefully read cues indicating whether they are accepted or rejected, and frequently adjust their behavior and appearance to reduce the risk of rejection. This adaptive strategy, while helpful in short-term social navigation, can create a psychological burden because the individual must constantly remain in a state of alertness toward the possibility of negative judgment. In contrast, those from high-status backgrounds tend to be more relaxed in their self-presentation because they do not feel the same threat to their status. They can present themselves more authentically because they have the confidence that their identity will not be questioned. This difference in self-presentation styles

reflects how social status not only influences material access but also shapes the structure of feeling that profoundly affects an individual's subjective experience in daily social life. In a society that highly values appearance and self-presentation, the ability to present oneself with confidence becomes an important asset that, unfortunately, is not distributed equally among different status groups.

Social mobility the movement of individuals from one status layer to another creates unique dynamics in identity construction (Iacoviello & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2019). Someone experiencing an increase in status, for instance through education or economic success, faces the challenge of building a new identity that aligns with their new position without completely abandoning their origins. In sociological studies, this challenge is often referred to as *habitus clivé*, a concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu and further explored by Sam Friedman (2016), which explains the condition of split cultural dispositions when someone moves social classes; as a result, they feel they no longer fully fit into their class of origin but are also not yet fully accepted in their new class. This challenge is often manifested in the form of tension between the habits and values inherited from the family and original environment and the behavioral demands expected from the newly entered status group. Someone from a manual labor background who successfully becomes a professional in the corporate sector must learn to adjust their way of speaking, dressing, and even their tastes and preferences to suit the norms of their new group. This adjustment process can last a long time and is often accompanied by feelings of inauthenticity, as if playing a role that is not themselves. Research conducted by Wendy Mee (2019) on the mobility of Malay women on the Indonesia-Malaysia border shows that moving social positions through migration and cross-border work forces individuals to constantly renegotiate their ethnic and gender identities, creating tension between old cultural expectations and new social realities. On the other hand, those experiencing a decline in status face different challenges: how to maintain a sense of self-worth when the social position that has been the primary source of self-meaning begins to erode. Someone who loses a prestigious job may experience a profound identity crisis because they can no longer rely on the professional identity they once depended on. In both cases, social mobility shows that identity is not permanently attached to

the individual but must be constantly reworked in line with changes in social position.

The dynamics of a constantly changing social environment provide additional pressure on the process of identity construction (Phillips et al., 2020). Contemporary society is characterized by high-speed changes, where norms prevailing today can become obsolete in a relatively short time. This condition creates significant uncertainty for individuals striving to build a stable identity. What is considered a respected identity at one time may become a stigmatized identity at the next, without any change in the individual concerned. An activist viewed as a hero during a period of authoritarianism can become a suspicious figure when the regime changes. An artist considered eccentric and deviant at a certain time can become an icon when public taste shifts. These fluctuations in social values show that identity is never fully under the individual's control, as the meaning society attaches to a specific identity can change at any time and unpredictably. The inability to control how others perceive a constructed identity becomes a significant source of anxiety, especially for those whose identities rely heavily on recognition from the environment. In such situations, some individuals choose to build more flexible identities that are not too tied to external assessments, while others further harden their identities as a form of defense against uncertainty.

The most significant environmental change in recent decades is the transformation of economic structures shifting forms of work and traditional sources of livelihood (Mareková, 2020). The loss of jobs in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, which once served as the backbone of working-class identity, creates a collective identity crisis for groups that have long defined themselves through that work. When factories close and agricultural lands change function, it is not just sources of income that are lost, but the entire social and cultural order that has provided meaning to daily life. This experience of loss is often expressed in the form of nostalgia for the past, which becomes a way for individuals to maintain an identity beginning to be eroded by the changing times. On the other hand, the emergence of new jobs in the digital economy sector opens possibilities for new identities that did not previously exist. Professions such as content creators, influencers, or app developers offer identities that are more fluid and not tied to specific institutions, yet they are also more vulnerable

because the sustainability of that identity depends heavily on algorithmic fluctuations and rapidly changing trends. This economic transformation shows that identity construction cannot be separated from broader economic structures, as sources of self-meaning often stem from the productive activities individuals perform within society.

The urban environment, where most of the world's population currently resides, offers its own unique dynamics in identity construction (Anca, 2012). Cities provide an anonymity that allows individuals to detach themselves from the strict surveillance of traditional communities and explore various identity possibilities without fear of judgment from neighbors or relatives. A newcomer to a large city can build an identity entirely different from the one they held in their hometown, starting a new life without the burden of a looming past. This freedom opens opportunities for identity experimentation that would be impossible in more homogeneous and controlled rural environments. However, anonymity also brings the consequence of reduced social support traditionally obtained from conventional communities. Individuals in urban areas often feel lonely and isolated, lacking networks that can provide validation and support when facing an identity crisis. They must build their own social networks to serve as a source of meaning, a process that requires significant time and energy. The tension between the freedom offered by urban life and the need for connection, which is the basis of identity formation, becomes a hallmark of the identity experience in contemporary society. Many people are caught between the desire to be themselves according to their own choices and the need to be accepted by others, without ever truly achieving a satisfying balance.

The digital environment has created a new dimension in environmental dynamics that affects identity construction (Mareková, 2020). Digital spaces offer the possibility for individuals to display identities that may differ from their real-life identities, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Someone who is shy and quiet in face-to-face interactions can present themselves as a confident and vocal figure on social media. This flexibility opens the possibility of exploring aspects of the self that might be suppressed in daily life, providing space for a more complete development of identity. However, the digital environment also creates new pressures in the form of the need to manage a permanent

digital footprint. Every statement, every post, and every interaction conducted in the digital space is recorded and can be rediscovered years later; thus, mistakes in identity management can have long-term consequences. Additionally, digital platform algorithms tend to reinforce existing identities by displaying content that matches user preferences and behavior, thereby creating echo chambers that limit exposure to different perspectives. Individuals who spend a lot of time in digital spaces may experience a narrowing of identity, where they become increasingly trapped in categories determined by algorithms and lose the ability to explore identities outside those categories. The digital environment is thus not merely a neutral space where identity is displayed, but an active environment that shapes identity through mechanisms often unrecognized by its users.

Cultural environmental changes also significantly affect identity construction, especially in societies undergoing rapid value transformations (Thomas et al., 2016). Shifting values regarding gender, for example, have forced many individuals to re-examine their understanding of what it means to be male or female. Masculinity norms that were considered the standard for generations are beginning to be questioned, and new models of being a man one who is gentler, more expressive, and more concerned with relationships are starting to emerge. This change is liberating for some who have long felt oppressed by rigid gender expectations, yet it also causes confusion for those accustomed to clear and stable definitions of gender identity. The same applies to values regarding the family, where the traditional family model with strict role divisions between husband and wife is shifting toward more diverse models. Individuals building identities as parents or partners must now do so in an environment where there is no longer a single model considered "normal," forcing them to be more active in defining what it means to be a good parent or partner for themselves. This shift in values demonstrates that identity construction always occurs within a specific cultural environment, and when that cultural environment changes, individuals must make adjustments to the self-understanding they previously considered established.

The social environment also influences identity construction through mechanisms of daily interaction that appear simple but have a

massive cumulative effect (Magomedova, 2022). Every interaction with others carries messages about who we are in their eyes messages conveyed through words, voice intonation, body language, and various other subtle cues. Someone who is consistently treated with respect will internalize the message that they are a person worthy of respect, while someone who is frequently belittled will tend to view themselves in a diminished way. This internalization process occurs gradually and often unconsciously, yet its effects are profound in shaping identity. In a society still colored by discrimination based on class, ethnicity, or gender, individuals from discriminated groups must face negative messages about their identity every day, which, if not resisted, can erode their self-esteem. Conversely, those from dominant groups receive positive messages that reinforce their sense of self-worth, often without realizing that the privileges they enjoy are the result of an unjust social structure. Thus, identity construction is never a politically neutral process but always occurs within a field of power where certain identities are systematically valued higher than others.

An individual's ability to respond to the influence of social status and environmental dynamics is largely determined by the resources they possess, whether in the form of economic capital, cultural capital, or social capital (Kartysheva, 2022). Individuals with adequate economic capital can purchase access to environments that are more supportive of positive identity construction, such as good schools, safe neighborhoods, and extracurricular activities that build self-confidence. This demonstrates how vital basic facility support is for a person's growth, especially regarding the guaranteed rights to proper education and health for children (Hariyani, Aliyah, & Issalillah, 2021). They also have the ability to protect themselves from unsupportive environments by choosing whom they associate with and where they spend their time. In contrast, individuals with limited resources are often forced into environments that do not support positive identity construction, such as low-quality schools, high-crime neighborhoods, and social circles that limit their aspirations.

Cultural capital, in the form of knowledge about valued ways of behaving in society, is also a key factor distinguishing an individual's ability to navigate environmental influences. As explained by Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital consists of three forms: the embodied state (knowledge and dispositions ingrained within the individual), the objectified state (cultural

goods such as books and artworks), and the institutionalized state (academic qualifications that provide formal recognition), all of which can be converted into advantages in social competition. In today's professional world, this cultural understanding greatly helps someone adapt amidst organizational diversity that demands an inclusive attitude (Irfan & Hariani, 2023). Those from families with high cultural capital learn early on how to present themselves in ways that will be valued by dominant institutions like schools and workplaces, while those from backgrounds with low cultural capital must learn these ways themselves at a significant psychological cost. An individual's ability to agentially mobilize and utilize social networks (social capital) contributes significantly to their success in navigating cultural differences and building a sense of belonging in transnational spaces, while also showing that the process of identity negotiation occurs continuously through the utilization of available resources. This uneven distribution of resources shows that identity construction is not merely a matter of individual choice but is also heavily influenced by the structural positions inherited from birth.

The most fundamental environmental change in contemporary society is the erosion of authority in traditional institutions that were once the primary references in identity construction (Warin, 2015). Religion, the state, family, and local communities, which previously held the authority to define legitimate and illegitimate identities, have now lost their monopoly. This phenomenon is highly visible in how we communicate and gather today, where social interaction patterns have shifted significantly toward digital communities and virtual spaces (Darmawan, 2021). Individuals no longer have to accept identity definitions from these institutions but can choose from various alternative sources, including the media, new identity groups, or even define their own identity without referring to any external authority. This freedom brings unprecedented opportunities for individuals to build identities that truly align with their desires and aspirations.

However, freedom also brings a burden because individuals must take full responsibility for the identity choices they make. When the definition of identity is provided by an external authority, the individual can blame that authority if the provided identity is unsatisfying. Conversely, when individuals choose their own identity, failure to build a

satisfying identity can only be blamed on themselves. This burden of responsibility can be a source of significant anxiety, especially for those who do not possess adequate resources to perform identity work independently. This condition is often complicated by changes in human relationships in urban areas, which tend to be more individualistic and dynamic (Irfan & Al Hakim, 2022). The erosion of traditional institutional authority thus creates a paradoxical situation: greater freedom in identity construction on one hand, but greater pressure to succeed in the identity project on the other.

In facing the influence of social status and complex environmental dynamics, individuals develop various strategies to maintain identity coherence (Liu, 2017). The most common strategy is by building a life narrative capable of integrating various experiences, including difficult or traumatic ones, into a meaningful story about oneself. One real challenge today is maintaining a balance between work affairs and private life, especially within flexible work systems that have a direct impact on family dynamics (Irfan, Darmawan, & da Costa, 2023). This narrative provides a framework that allows individuals to understand why they are in a certain position within the social structure, why the environment changes in specific ways, and how they can maintain a sense of self-worth amidst those changes.

A strong identity narrative allows individuals to see changes in status or environment not as a threat to themselves, but as a new chapter in a continuing life journey. Individuals who succeed in building a coherent identity narrative demonstrate greater resilience in facing pressures from low social status or unfavorable environmental changes. Through this narrative, a person can better appreciate differences and support the creation of social order in a diverse environment (Irfan & Hariani, 2023). They are able to maintain a sense of self-worth even though the surrounding environment may constantly send demeaning messages. Conversely, individuals who do not possess a coherent identity narrative are more vulnerable to the negative influences of social status and environmental dynamics, as they lack a stable framework to interpret their experiences.

The process of identity construction is ultimately relational, where the influence of social status and environmental dynamics is always filtered

through interactions with significant others (Herriot, 2020). A person may come from a low social status but still build a positive identity if they have people around them capable of providing the necessary validation and support. Conversely, someone with high social status may experience an identity crisis if they do not have meaningful relationships with others who can confirm the identity they wish to build. Family, close friends, mentors, and supportive communities function as mirrors that help individuals see themselves in a way that allows for growth and development. Essentially, the way we interact in the current era of digital society greatly determines how we view ourselves and others (Darmawan, 2021). The quality of relationships an individual has with those around them thus becomes a highly decisive factor in whether the influence of social status and environmental dynamics will become a barrier or a driver for positive identity construction.

Thus, social status influences identity construction through the internalization of cognitive schemas from an early age, the formation of different self-presentation styles across status groups, and the specific challenges that arise in the experience of social mobility (Canadas, 2022). Constantly changing environmental dynamics, including the transformation of economic structures, urbanization, developments in digital technology, shifts in cultural values, and the erosion of traditional institutional authority, create uncertainties that affect identity stability. Therefore, it is very important for us to continue adapting to changing patterns of social relationships to survive in modern society (Irfan & Al Hakim, 2022). The ability to build a coherent identity narrative becomes a key factor distinguishing an individual's capacity to manage the influence of social status and environmental dynamics. Ultimately, identity construction is relational, where interactions with significant others serve as a mirror that determines the development of a positive identity. This process is the result of a complex interaction between an individual's structural position, environmental changes, the resources possessed, and the quality of relationships built with others around them.

Conclusion

The construction of social identity in contemporary society is a complex and dynamic process, which cannot be understood as a final achievement

but rather as a project that is continuously worked on throughout life. The process of group affiliation becomes the primary entry point where individuals seek not only social acceptance but also interpretative frameworks that allow them to make sense of their life experiences. In facing the diversity of available affiliations, individuals develop strategies of segmentation or integration with different consequences for identity coherence. Meanwhile, social status influences identity construction through the internalization of cognitive schemas from an early age and the formation of different styles of self-presentation, with social mobility creating unique challenges in the form of tension between origins and new positions. Ever-changing environmental dynamics, including economic transformation, urbanization, digital technology development, shifts in cultural values, and the erosion of traditional institutional authority, create uncertainties that affect identity stability. An individual's ability to manage these influences is largely determined by the resources they possess and the quality of relationships with significant others. Ultimately, identity construction is relational and dialogical, where the individual and the environment mutually shape one other in an ongoing process.

Theoretically, this study enriches the understanding of identity construction by demonstrating that the process cannot be reduced solely to individual choice or structural determination, but is rather the result of a dialectical interaction between the two. This implication shifts the analytical focus from approaches that separate agency and structure toward an approach that understands both as mutually shaping in the process of identity construction. Practically, the results of this study provide direction for the development of interventions in the fields of education, counseling, and community development. Approaches sensitive to identity complexity need to be designed by considering that individuals may have various conflicting affiliations, and that changes in social status and environment require adequate support so as not to disrupt identity coherence. Community development needs to consider how designed interventions can strengthen social capital and provide space for individuals to explore identity within a supportive environment.

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**Social Identity Construction in Contemporary Society: A Study on Group Affiliation and
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