

“Identity” and “Lifestyle” of the Characters in Zadie Smith’s NW (north-west)

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Abstract

This paper discusses the identity and lifestyle of the characters Leah Hanwell, Natalie Blake, Felix Cooper, and Nathan Bogle. These characters are wrecked with weird attitudes, leading to an absurd way of living their life. The evidence in the fiction proves that the individual identity and its crisis differentiate their lifestyle and keep on changing. Certain mortals fall into drug addiction, and from that, their lifestyle is pushed to devastation. Journal articles and books are the sources of data. The paper concludes that a person's identity shatters due to the circumstances, and the lifestyle brings a huge change, either positively or negatively.

Keywords: Attitudes, Drug addiction, Identity, Lifestyle

Introduction

Identity is a unique term that points out separate characteristics, and this term does not particularly refer to elite classes or commoners. From birth to death, the identity speaks louder, which brings their individuality, and even after demise, a person's identity has existed forever. The word 'identity' was first used by the famous psychologist Erik Erikson in the 1950s, and at present, it has become the most trending word in contemporary society. The term 'identity' was first approached from a sociological context (Fearon). The literary definition of identity refers to the personality traits of the characters and how the readers identify their characterization in person. It can also be defined as how society treats a person's identity based on their race. In literature, there are more literary writers who apply the term 'identity' in different contexts. The nineteenth-century writer George Eliot

explored the theme of identity in a realistic manner. Identity completely comes from the lifestyle, where the circumstances create opportunities for all individuals, and it all depends on how a person is going to utilize it in order to build his or her way of living in contrast to others. According to John Locke, identity is a psychological matter that connects our deeper senses. The term 'lifestyle' was first introduced by Alfred Adler, a famous Austrian psychologist, in 1929. From 1961 onwards, the definition of 'lifestyle' has been authenticated as a way or style of living, and it's an amalgamation of determining palpable and impalpable things. The word 'lifestyle' has different connotations in the postmodern world. Previous studies on identity and lifestyle show that these two terms are structured based on consumption factors. Lifestyle and consumption are two non-separable terms, and these two merge to construct an identity in modern society (Rizi and Sabeghi 14-20).

Identity construction differs as per gender roles. Masculinity has a specific characteristic that can be played in society. Masculinity has taken time to understand that they are also a part of the gender construction. In contrast, femininity spreads its existence throughout all phases of their lives. Both males and females have significant roles in the contemporary world. In the novel *NW*, Smith gives more importance to women compared to men. The authenticities of women were portrayed efficiently as the consequences of their footsteps. Women are forced to portray hybrid identities in their employment and family life. By playing dual roles, they are affected psychologically, and basically, their lifestyle is restricted. The proclamation of 'equal rights for women' sorts out the problem and brings the solution for women to determine their self-identity. At present, women have gained more liberty, but one of their toughest tasks is still to balance their household chores and employment (Parveen and Chandwani 908-910).

Literary texts from various genres also create a particular identity based on the theme of the content. Literature can bring a pure bliss of identity, which soothes the reader with its powerful diction. In general, fictional characters deeply connect with readers because they exhibit emotional criteria both inwardly and outwardly. Literary characters portray multiple elements like tragedy, comedy, and tragicomedy, and all of these grab readers' attention. The framework of the novel exactly relates to contemporary society, where one can approach the author, particularly adhering to the societal problem or the author's imagination, which merges with reality. As a contemporary British author, Zadie Smith explores her individuality through the genres of novels, short stories, and essays. In all her works, she prominently uses different writing techniques to enhance her style. This research article mainly chooses a specific work for the purpose of exploring the key concepts of identity and lifestyle. Zadie Smith's *NW* was the fourth novel, and it was published in the year 2012. This novel strongly focuses on the analysis of each characteristic's state of mind

rather than concentrating on the storyline.

Literature Review

Scrutinizers on NW are mostly engrossed with themes like locality, transmute, class structure, actuality, and reflective representation for the purpose of disclosing that identity is a complete reflection of certain lifestyles. The main objective of this review of literature is to provide multiple data interpretations and to treat all those through the lens of identification as the novel portrays the influence of lifestyle, which brings such kinds of stuff among the characters. According to Yuvalari et al., self-authenticity has been reformulated on the basis of the new regulations constrained by society. The process of self-authenticity is truly based on social construction, and the individual interacts as per the diversity (143).

As Walters stated (Walters 5), Smith has efficiently used 'identity politics' in all her genres to convey racial and cultural perceptions. Smith has widely addressed gender politics and, most particularly, the literary traditions of black females. Gilroy, in his work entitled *Postcolonial Melancholia*, mentioned that 21st-century England is a culture of "melancholia" enduring from the "pathology of greatness" (89). The character Felix still remembers the first glimpse of a girl named 'Annie.' The character 'Annie' belongs to the upper-middle class, and her lifestyle portrays prestige and pride, but she reflects her identity as an addicted person. Felix's lifestyle is totally different because of his surroundings, and he defines social changes as unfathomable (Custer 24).

In recent times, scholars from the disciplines of social sciences and humanities have shown a great interest in questioning identity. Most of them bring forward the concept of 'identity politics' from the perspectives of racism, sexuality, and gender discrimination. Compared to the scholars of history and the humanities, political scientists deny putting forward the term 'identity.' The initiatives have been taken by social historians and the literature and cultural students who were greatly influenced by Michel Foucault. The literature students, as well as cultural and social historians, have widespread knowledge of the concept of identity in multiple aspects (Fearon).

Material and Methods

In this research, the fictional characters of the novel 'NW' have been taken as primary materials to understand the depth of individualism with reference to the lifestyle presented in the storyline. In addition, several internet sites, research papers, and contemporary occurrences have been applied to acknowledge different perspectives on personality traits. All these materials pave the way to finding out the correlation between 'identity' and 'lifestyle.' Descriptive methodology has been applied to this research study to examine the weird attitudes of the literary characters, namely Leah Hanwell, Natalie Blake, Felix

Cooper, and Nathan Bogle. The description of addiction reveals human madness to alter themselves according to their lifestyle. Furthermore, this study follows an explanation and interpretation of the research findings along with literary sources.

Theory of Identity

“Visitation” is the novel’s first chapter, which reveals the characterization of Leah Hanwell, who worries about her identity and craves the lifestyle of her friend Natalie Blake. These two maintained a good relationship in their earlier stages, but when they constructed their financial growth individually, their friendship faded due to their economic status. When the identity is approached economically, that would be termed as human identity, where the mortals are influenced by one another to pursue multiple lifestyles. Hence, it is proven that the theory of identity becomes critical to capture an economic issue, which later paves the way to rebuild lifestyles. Identity economics is a significant new approach that represents the personal identity of an individual that has changed commercially. A person’s several social commitments silhouette his or her identity. The notion of individual identity has been hidden in the crisis of standard economics (Mlinar & Crespo 193-194). Leah is a complicated girl who suffers between her marriage and employment. Her work environment is filled with lots of gossip, and that spoils her identity. As a spouse, she fails to enlighten her husband’s wish and contradicts in all aspects. She consumes contraception and lives a life full of emptiness.

The second character’s identity is revealed in the chapter entitled “Guest,” where a person named Felix and his lifestyle are totally corrupted due to his addiction to drugs. Narcotics is a specific department that predominantly deals with opium and cocaine consumption, drowsiness caused by drugs, capsules, alcohol, and slamming. The character Felix always picks up a bottle of poxy-whadyacallitrendridine, which is closed with a red cap, and he will mix along with the alcohol, which will turn into a manic-mellow buzz, exactly like ketamine-laced Ecstasy (Smith 142). His lifestyle is terribly cramped with addiction trauma, and when he decides to start a new career path, a group of strangers attacks him brutally and pushes him to death. Smith has given a realistic view of addiction from St Mary’s Hospital, North West London. Different age groups, like fathers, old ladies, and youngsters, crave consuming nicotine vastly, and moreover, everybody loves fags (39). Most people are bold enough to accept their identity as an alcoholic person, and a self-respecting Englishman might accept the situation as “I’m on antibiotics, and I’m on alcoholic” (Smith 124). Felix’s interpersonal relationships are filled with illegal activities, and he has a wide connection with drug dealers. Globally, drugs have been distributed among youngsters, and they are highly demanding to consume only drugs rather than alcohol and tobacco. Based on their addiction, a new style is created because of the impact

and dominance of chemical abuse. The lifestyle that an addicted person builds is always unsustainable. A person needs to grow in all aspects in order to come out from the intoxication and to build a healthy lifestyle.

The chapter "Host" is fully focused on revealing Natalie Blake's identity and lifestyle. Her real name is Keisha, and she is curious to learn about grown-up people. Keisha's mother always insists on her: "Stop gazing. Lift your foot" (Smith 173). Keisha has a strong determination and the power to crack everything in all her new ventures. This lifts her identity, which none of them could ever imagine. She even changes her moniker after she enters college, and her transformation from childhood to adulthood is immeasurable. The name Keisha literally means 'loyalty,' and the main intention behind changing her name is that she is loyal only to her identity and not to any of her community or relationships. So, she gave herself a new appellation as Natalie. Even the author of this novel, Zadie Smith, has changed her name. She was born Sadie Smith; later, she converted the first letter of her clepe to Zadie. She justifies the role of modification because she finds her name too exotic, and that's the result of her new identity.

The outer appearance of Nathan is critically portrayed with the juxtaposition of staggering the child on this man (45). The Afro style of this man is uneven, and his clothes look untidy. The humanistic view of Nathan has faded, and he has deeply delved into crime factors. His face had grown up in years than it actually is, and his neck had white blotches. Above all, his line of beauty still stands greenish. In the streets of Kilburn and Willesden, Nathan was distributing travel cards, and the biggest failure was that "he dropped out to become a footballer" (63). 'Crossing' is the fourth chapter that reveals the entry of Nathan and the graceful bond between Nathan and Natalie that saved her from the danger of suicide. The educated Natalie attempts to commit suicide because of her familial issue, and when she is ready to jump from Caldwell's boundary wall, the identity of Nathan is revealed through his voice. He prevents her from self-destruction (300).

The novel has two addicted personalities named Felix and Nathan. Felix is a 32-year-old man who got deeply affected by the drug thing, and he honestly accepts by mentioning, "I'm just basically picking myself up off the floor from that the past few years, so" (126). He also indulged in jobs like feminine trafficking and nearly sold three thousand girls across the country (127). Nathan loves the smell of cigarettes, and he used to spill tobacco all over the day. He has a large package of orange Rizlas, a drug content that is always held between his teeth (302). Mortals like to gain extreme pleasure by ingesting white and brown, natural and chemical, pills and powder (Smith 44).

The present research aims to investigate dual identities and how each identity relates to a different lifestyle. An affidavit is a formal disclosure that declares the dual name

identity of a person who can hold a binary appellation legally. Keisha maintains a good relationship with her friend Leah, but it does not last forever because jealousy corrupts this beautiful bond. The novel completely spins from the perspective of Keisha to Natalie, and she is the first one to enter college for the purpose of gaining the first-degree holder position. She successfully became a barrister and a self-made woman who fought hard to attain all her desires. The fictional character Michel satirically comments on Natalie's affidavit by mentioning, "Dress for the job you want, not the one you have" (Smith 63). As a Jamaican immigrant in north-west London, Natalie built a luxurious lifestyle with her husband, Frank. Keisha has a historical root in Jamaica. Predominantly, Jamaicans are of African descent, and they are well-equipped in all aspects. The identity of these people speaks louder through their lifestyle backgrounds. As a Jamaican immigrant to north-west London, Natalie shines in her own way, pulling hard to grow in her career. Many Jamaicans have improved their way in a multicultural land like Britain, but they still struggle desperately to register their sense of belongingness in the nation.

In 1962, Caribbean countries, specifically Jamaica, gained their liberty from Great Britain. There are more Jamaicans living in London, and their identity is vastly explicit in their lifestyle. Some parts of the country treat Jamaicans based on their race, and their identity is often spoiled in this culturally diverse land. To escape from these societal constructions, Natalie scrambles up the economic ladder, that is filled with upper-class modernity. She aims to live a postmodern life, and hence, she has proven herself by living an elite lifestyle. Leah notices the grandeur of the Victorian house and the length of the garden, which clearly portrays a barrister and banker house. By looking into this fortune lifestyle, Leah hates her best friend Natalie Blake (Smith 60).

Postmodern identities contrast with individuals' identities, and even a person cannot come to a conclusion because their lifestyle has been altered day by day. Within a quick span, Natalie envisions her postmodern lifestyle by constructing a Victorian house that consists of a beautiful kitchen and French doors, and it all makes her friend Leah feel jealous of her way of life (65). From the age of sixteen to eighteen, Natalie Blake highly concentrated on her career, and that helped to construct her identity. During this time, Leah smoked weed all the live-long day (71). Teenagers are the great spoilers of the postmodern era, and they are vastly involved in societal life. Teenagers look forward to a great transformation that ends either positively or negatively. For the most part, all those mutations lead them in a destructive way. Popular culture highly mesmerizes young adults, which influences them to think critically from all perspectives.

Contemporary Lifestyle

The most disgusting scenario of postmodernism is that people are ready to advertise

their living style and fail to identify their background. Lexicology helps elite people add fragrance to their sentence formation for the purpose of enhancing their working lifestyle. People signify various emotions to convey their lifestyle, and it's quite normal in the postmodern age. Mortals pay more attention to specifying their livelihood in the most efficient way so that their appearance might be superior compared to other classes. The emergence of lifestyle displays paves the way towards blending multiple cultures, and that stands as perfect evidence in the postmodern era. Multiculturalism produces a hybrid identity that creates a new identity among individualism, and this brings vast changes. Life remains a dilemma unless one realizes the true color of identity (Kaur, 2020). Postmodernism is a term that has been around since the age of modernity, and it's an independent one that intermingles diverse cultures among the population (Riepe, 2012). A modern lifestyle breaks all the norms of traditional conventions and craves new changes. It strictly fits into satisfying one's needs at any point in time. Individualism speaks louder in the period of modernity, which rapidly increases selfishness and weird attitudes among humans. Modern lifestyles have brought an inexhaustible change due to the invention of technological advancement, where people are stuck up with digital gadgets. Modernity demands a proper work-life balance for the purpose of sustaining a good lifestyle. The complexity lies in individualism, which craves personal growth in all circumstances that turn out to be egocentric. Modern technology has both pros and cons, but it stands neutral for the users. Particularly, technology either brings fortune or impediments to individuals. The effects of modern technology affect the psychosocial lives of individuals. Professionals from the University of Washington have perceived that digitalization breaks human connections and leads them to isolate themselves from reality. This generates a psychological issue that deeply influences human' mentality. Imagination always spoils a person's identity in reality.

Conclusion

Lifestyles are simply structured based on individuals' enrichment, and they should not either spoil or influence other livelihoods. Contemporary lifestyles affect individuals' mindsets, and that changes a person's needs, demands, and abilities, and it may end up complicated when they indulge in wrongdoing. Mortals should vanish influence from their livelihood so that they can nourish their lifestyle as per their identity. Adaptation is a common term that a person should follow for the purpose of enhancing their identity. Each character has a specific identity and a different lifestyle to be followed. The only solution for a human is to identify the correlation between 'identity' and 'lifestyle' to lead a moderate life. When these two become contradictory, it definitely spoils the attitude.

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