

# Identity

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Identity may simply be defined as who or what a person or thing is: sameness.

Children who move into different environments for example to another country or even fostered or adopted trans-racially could lose their own cultural identity. Every culture has its own traditional way of caring for children backed up by old customs and based on the belief that the practices are for therapeutic or prospective purposes.

What makes up a child's cultural background? Certainly, it is in part genetically determined. We are all born into a genetically determined family, the product of both our parents, which creates our ethnicity and biological inheritance. Culture, however, involves more than ethnicity and biological make-up.

One's culture includes all that makes up one's life-style - values, occupations, interpersonal relationships, the literature, the media, what one can buy, what one can attain, one's natural environment and the ways in which the accumulated knowledge of the society is passed on to the next generation and modified by science, technology and the arts.

In all cultures, child-rearing practices have always been a major vehicle for transmission of cultural values. Parents train their children in what they regard as appropriate behaviour, but that behaviour is not always seen as appropriate when the child moves into other environment outside the family such as school or the peer group.

In most cultures, if not all, obedience to parents and authority figures is expected. And there are many methods used to counter disobedience or undesirable behaviour.

**Manners:** A young person, as a sign of respect, should not look straight into the eyes of an adult talking to him or her. To do so is considered rude and even confrontational. To answer back, even with a relevant explanation, could also be considered as rude. This can make interviewing youngsters difficult and sexual abuse investigations in an older child, especially a girl, may be even more problematical than usual.

Children growing up in a western culture who have been taught in school to 'look at me when I am talking to you' face a dilemma especially when dealing with older people from their own culture.

There is a culturally correct way of handing things to or receiving them from others especially older people. This should not be done with the left hand even if the individual is left-handed or the right hand is already occupied. If it means not handling the object this is usually preferred and if it has to be done, it is preceded by a sincere apology.

**Scarification Marks / Tribal Marks:** These are cuts of various sizes deliberately done on the skin. Some are made on the children to identify them to their particular tribes (tribal marks). Scarification marks are much smaller. Special potions are applied to them after they have been made which leave them darker and permanent. Seen in the freshly made state, they look cruel and could be called abuse.

Scarification marks are meant to protect the baby from evil eyes and from being taken away by the gods. They are also made in some cases to cure ailments.