

**Performing Identity: The Politics and Pedagogy of Witnessing the Self**  
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Abstract Summary

This study examines performance art as a means of exploring identity. In particular, it investigates the unique strategies that performance artists utilize to interrogate the social, cultural and political forces that construct identity and thus bear upon subjectivity. At the same time, of equal interest to this inquiry is a discrepancy that exists between such contemporary practices and the more traditional practice of self-portraiture, so prevalent in the field of art education.

Drawing on the work of postmodern and poststructuralist theorists, developmental psychologists, critical educators, contemporary performance artists and age-appropriate students, the study formulates a three-pronged theoretical hypothesis in defense of more contemporary practices. The conjecture consists of the following: first, identity may be viewed more accurately as performative; second, giving and witnessing testimony has political and pedagogical implications, and; third, such practices generates criticality, which in turn cultivate personal agency. Central to the verification of this hypothesis, the author presents an original work of performance, analyzing the ways in which it corroborates it.

Through this combination of methodologies, the study finds that, because of its unique use of the body as a site of discourse, and due to its ability to pose rhetorical metaphors that elicit greater criticality, performance art may yield a richer art of identity. Because of these uniquenesses, the study further finds that performance art may bear particular relevance for adolescents and young adults. As this population is known to grapple with specific issues surrounding identity formation--including race, gender, religion, sexual orientation and other forms of difference--an emphasis on performance art may constitutes particularly valuable pedagogy. For through it, students examine, verbalize, critique and renegotiate their perceived discordances within their respective socio-political realities, and thus are likely to cultivate a greater sense of agency. The study concludes that such findings expand the possibilities of an art of identity, beyond those afforded by traditional strategies. As such, it recommends that these findings be incorporated into current art education studio pedagogy.

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