NEWS LESSON

When Do We Finally Know Who We Are?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Do you think you will feel like the same person at 60 as you do now? Why?
2. Is it a good thing or a bad thing to keep changing your views and goals? Why?
3. Where do your most important beliefs come from: your own thinking or other people?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**longitudinal**	☐	A	single people, not a group
2	**individuals**	☐	B	following the same people or things over a long period of time
3	**define**	☐	C	general changes or patterns over time
4	**significant**	☐	D	people who take part in a study or activity
5	**trends**	☐	E	a public statement giving news
6	**participants**	☐	F	to think that something is a certain way
7	**announcement**	☐	G	important or special
8	**consider**	☐	H	to say exactly what a word or idea means

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A Finnish study that followed the same people between the ages of 27 and 61 found that identity kept developing well into adulthood, and that stronger identity development went together with better mental wellbeing.

1 If you had to pick the age when people ask themselves who they are, you would probably say the teenage years. Identity has often been treated as a task for adolescence, partly because very few studies have followed people for long enough to see what happens afterwards. A research team in Finland has now done exactly that, and their findings suggest that we are still working on ourselves long after we have left school.

2 The data come from the Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Personality and Social Development, which has followed the same individuals for more than 50 years. Professor Lea Pulkkinen led it from 1968 to 2012, and Katja Kokko has led it since 2013. It is mainly funded by the Research Council of Finland. In a paper in the Journal of Adult Development, doctoral researcher Liinu Marin and colleagues looked at identity when the participants were 27, 36, 42, 50 and 61, and at mental wellbeing at 36, 42, 50 and 61.

3 The researchers define identity as a person's view of who they are and what they consider important in different areas of life. It gives a sense of continuity over time. To measure how it develops, they looked at how firmly people were committed to their views, and whether those views had been formed through personal exploration or adopted from significant others or society. A well-developed identity, in this sense, rests on clear views that someone has explored for themselves.

4 On average, identity developed in a positive direction between the ages of 27 and 61, and most of the change took place between 27 and 42. Marin says this shows that identity can continue to develop throughout adulthood. In other words, a typical person in their thirties was still doing a good deal of work on the question of who they are.

5 The second part of the study looked at mental wellbeing, measured through psychological and social wellbeing, life satisfaction, and feelings of anxiety and depression. Psychological wellbeing covers things such as autonomy and a sense of purpose, and social wellbeing covers feeling connected to communities and society. A more positively developed identity was associated with better mental wellbeing, for example better psychological and social wellbeing and fewer feelings of anxiety.

6 It would be easy to read too much into that. The study did not examine the causal direction of the association. Marin points out that mental wellbeing may also support or challenge how identity forms, so the effect may cut both ways. These are also average trends, and the reports we read do not give the number of participants. The version on Phys.org appears to be based on the university's own announcement, so the two accounts are not independent.

7 What can we take from it? For a start, the idea that we should have everything worked out by thirty looks like a myth. A bit of searching in your thirties or forties may be a normal part of adult life.

Sources: Phys.org, Identity develops well into adulthood and is linked to better mental well-being; University of Jyväskylä, Identity develops well into adulthood and is linked to better mental well-being. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Katja Kokko has been in charge of the study for a shorter time than Lea Pulkkinen was. T F NG
2. Identity was measured at more ages than mental wellbeing was. T F NG
3. The study proved that a clear identity causes better wellbeing. T F NG
4. The study included more women than men. T F NG
5. The writer thinks the Phys.org article gives independent confirmation of the university's findings. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

adopted	awarded	challenge	formed	funded	independent	myth	temporary

1. The project is mainly _____ by a national research council.
2. Her political opinions were not really her own; she had simply _____ them from her parents.
3. A good coach will _____ players to work harder than they think they can.
4. It is a _____ that we only use ten per cent of our brains.
5. The two reports were not _____ , because one was based on the other.
6. Her political views were _____ by her years of living abroad.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Katja Kokko _____ the study since 2013. (LEAD)
2. By the time she turned thirty, she _____ three different careers. (TRY)
3. Many studies _____ in journals every year. (PUBLISH)
4. Marin and colleagues _____ at identity when the participants were 27, 36, 42, 50 and 61. (LOOK)
5. The questionnaire _____ by the research team before the survey began. (DESIGN)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Adjectives and verbs often need a fixed preposition. Check the word before the gap, not the one after it.

at by in of on to with

1. Some people remain committed _____ their goals for decades.
2. The conclusions were based _____ interviews carried out over many years.
3. Many adults struggle _____ the idea that they should have everything worked out.
4. Young people are often influenced _____ their friends more than their parents.
5. Many people are interested _____ finding out how their views developed.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Does it surprise you that identity kept developing after the age of 27? Why or why not?
2. Why might a clearer sense of identity go together with feeling less anxious?
3. How could a person explore who they are in their thirties or forties?

9 Role-play: a big change at forty

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the worried friend

Your friend wants to leave a safe job and start something new at forty. You're worried about money and risk. Ask at least two questions before you give your opinion.

Student B · the friend with a plan

You want to change your life: a new job, a new city or a new hobby. Explain why it matters to you and how you'll manage the risks. Try to persuade your friend.

Useful phrases

I've been thinking about doing something different.
I'm not sure it's the right time.
What would you do about money?
I know it's a risk, but I'd regret not trying.
You're still working out what you want, aren't you?
Let's agree to try it for six months.

Afterwards, tell the class: did the worried friend change their mind, and what helped?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 B · 2 A · 3 H · 4 G · 5 C · 6 D · 7 E · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 T · 3 F · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 funded · 2 adopted · 3 challenge · 4 myth · 5 independent · 6 formed

6 Verb forms

1 has led · 2 had tried · 3 are published · 4 looked · 5 was designed

7 Language focus

1 to · 2 on · 3 with · 4 by · 5 in

This lesson is free. If it saved you time, you can support johnplusnews at **ko-fi.com/johnplusenglish**