guest author
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IDENTITY PLAY

People's confidence with ambiguity leads to increased flirtation with multiple personalities

Identity Play can be a deep or shallow experience. It can be a personal revelation. A one-night holiday from your 9-5 personality. Or a new look created on a whim in front of the bathroom mirror.

It can happen with an impulsive decision, like ordering an herb-infused cocktail or renting an exotic sports car at the airport. Or it can become a regular part of someone's life, such as logging in nightly to a virtual world.

In whatever way it happens, Identity Play allows people to explore a wider variety of experiences and enjoy a more fluid sense of self.

TAKE ACTION *– designing for Life's Changes*

1.
Pull from plurality

How might we expose the consumer to a wider variety of ethnicities, lifestyles, and ages in order to help them evolve their sense of self?

2.
Look for opportunities to play

How might we spot the moments in people's lives when they are more open to play?

3.
Take a stand

How might design make a bold statement and attract consumers looking to explore a new facet of themselves?

4.
Provide options

How might we help people discover a wider variety of options available for personal expression?

The rockstar lifestyle comes standard at the Standard

Forget pillow menus and fresh-baked cookies. What draws guests to the LA Downtown Standard is the hotel's ability to transform an ordinary businessman into the frontman of an indie rock band.

A seat at the rooftop bar puts guests in the midst of what feels like an exclusive industry party. Starlet-wannabes in knee socks serve cocktails to the pretty people lounging on vibrating waterbed pods next to the infinity pool. Edgy movies project against the building next door. And everyone is scanning the crowd for star-power.

On a visit to LA, guests eschew their normal choice of Westin or Marriott for a place that, just for a night, helps them crank their personality up to 11. Of course, none of this happens by chance. Hotel designers know exactly what effect they're creating, right down to the vomiting stick-figure illustrations decorating guestroom trash cans.

Redefining beauty is a daily routine

For Elisha, 22, her morning beauty routine is an opportunity to define herself for the day. Surrounded by a myriad of products and potions, she can decide on a whim to straighten her hair, wear it wavy or add product to mimic perfect bed-head. By wearing different scents or switching lipsticks, Elisha has no shortage of options. For her, this morning ritual lets her make a variety of small choices about who she wants to be that day.

Transitional identities reside in Second Life

Virtual world pixie robot or stay-at-home mom? Second Life makes it possible to be both. Not content to accept the limiting perceptions others have of her in daily life, Hungarian mother Franciska chooses to express her wilder side in a unique environment where reality is loosely defined.

And while her own avatar closely resembles her true self, many people push their alternate identities to more extreme levels. Opposite genders. Mythical creatures. Some even take the form of their own dream partner.

Through Second Life, Franciska has been able to nurture deep relationships across the globe, even going so far as to vacation in the "real world" with fellow Second Life residents. She says she prefers these friendships because they allow her to engage as the person she believes herself to be rather than the one society assumes she is.
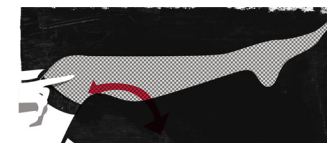
Gen Y manipulates identity across age and ethnicity

Time travel and teleportation are typical themes in science fiction, but now Gen Y is pushing these boundaries in their daily lives. Caucasian Carrie celebrates Mexican culture in her home and loves retro video games that were high-tech before she was born. And while we all go through processes of identity formation when we're young, with today's wider array of options, it's possible to play with a variety of cultures across the globe and throughout time.

Imaginary friends are no match for the virtual kind

When kids can lead alternative lives online, who needs imaginary friends? *New York Times* author, Michelle Slatalla recently wrote an article about her 10-year-old daughter's assortment of virtual playrooms. Club Penguin. Planet Cazmo. Dizzyworld. In the first half of 2008, there were over 100 virtual worlds for tweens. Slatalla's daughter plays online Scrabble and tells opponents she is a French single mother of twins (Jacques and Pierre) who has moved to the States to improve her English.

Mrs. Robinson still has the power to seduce

When is a simple glance enough to get the attention of an attractive stranger in a crowded room? When it's performed by someone with Mrs. Robinson sensibilities. In San Francisco, a group of women draw upon The Graduate's Mrs. Robinson archetype to express bolder parts of themselves. One initiate says, "Mrs. Robinson is desired by many, though they do not know what necessarily draws them to her. That power is not common. It is channeled. It exudes… To do as Mrs. Robinson does one must find that deep dark energy inside that, with utter control and a 'balls to the wall' mentality, permeates from every pore." - *www.mrsrobinsonsf.com*

Growing into your looks

Walking away from a high-powered job to travel the world says something about a person. So does sporting a moustache. When Michael left Austin to indulge his wanderlust, he soon decided to forgo the razor and shaving cream. When he came back, instead of cleaning up and returning to his former life, he decided to keep his facial hair as an expression of the new person he'd become. His original beard was groomed into various goatees, moustaches, and soul patches as he tried out different ways of being.

PATTERNS are a collection of shared thoughts, insights, and observations gathered through our work and the world around us. We invite you to join the conversation, so we can raise the bar and develop richer design thinking experiences collectively.

Be a pattern spotter: Now that you've been exposed to a few different examples, don't be surprised if you start seeing *Life's Changes* patterns all around. Keep your eyes open and let us know what you find, especially if it's the next new pattern.

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