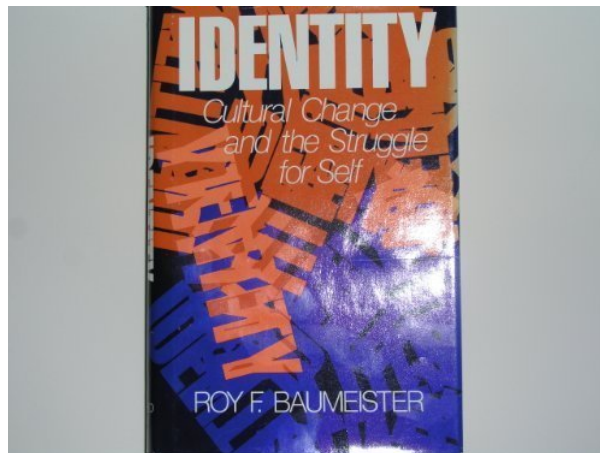
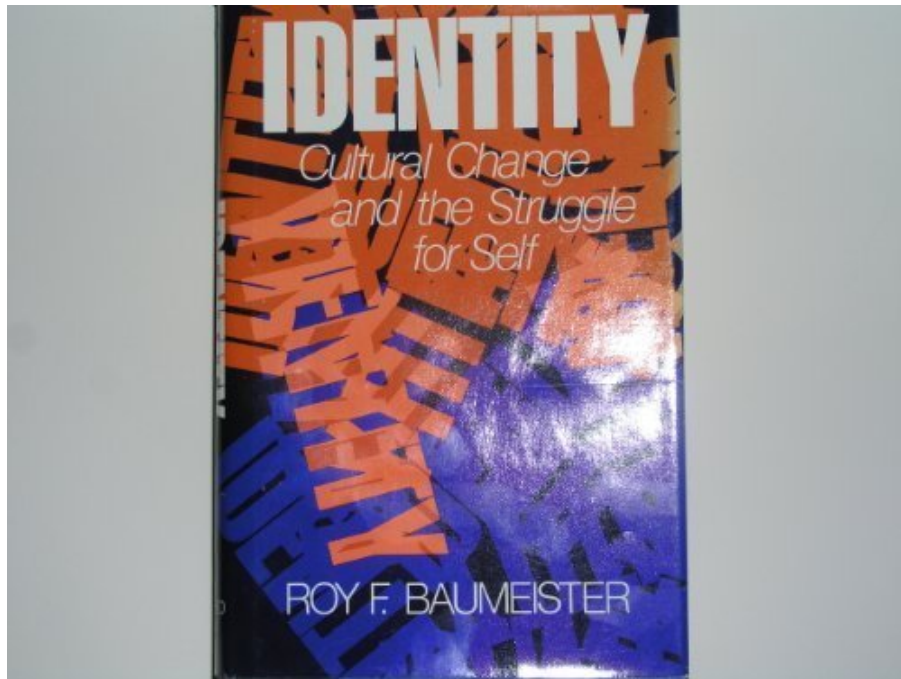


**IDENTITY: CULTURAL CHANGE AND THE
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What do we mean by "having an identity"? How has the process of establishing a personal identity changed over recent centuries? Is creating an identity harder today than in medieval times? Professor Baumeister explores these and other questions central to the understanding of the human personality and of deep personal concern to any individual. Drawing on a wealth of historical, cultural, literary, and philosophical evidence, the author describes the evolution of identity in the west over recent centuries--from the relatively simple and passive achievement of identity in feudal times to the more complex and uncertain process by which modern men and women must choose their identity. Out of this account and contemporary psychological research, the author delineates a theory of the nature and structure of identity. Along the way the reader is treated to fascinating discussions of how brainwashing works, how children learn who they are, the different kinds of identity crises, when and why the concept of a private or "hidden" self emerged, and how our view of love has changed from mild insanity to an ideal of fulfillment. Identity will be of interest to social, personality, and development psychologists, and their students. General readers will also find this book both stimulating and accessible.

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By T. bailey

Identity: cultural change and the struggle for self._book reviews Psychology Today November, 1986

The Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset once said that "to define is to exclude and negate." Perhaps that is why psychologist Roy Baumeister has chosen to describe rather than to define the central idea in *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self* (Oxford University, \$ 19.95). Identity, as Baumeister points out, is difficult to define, yet we all firmly believe we have one. And conceptual difficulties don't stop most of us from glibly discussing "identity crises" and "the self" as if these were concrete things.

Baumeister is on strongest ground when he examines identity from a historical vantage point. His clear discussion of the evolution of personal identity, from virtual nonexistence in the Middle Ages, through its gradualawakening during Renaissance, Romantic and Victorian times, to its place as a daily preoccupation in 1986, is convincing because it is well grounded in secondary historical sources.

Oddly, the book loses momentum when, in the last few chapters, the discussion turns to psychology. In the chapter on development of identity, for example, Baumeister ignores current ideas about the multiple bases of personality and fails even to mention psychoanalytic theory. Other passages concerning psychological topics, such as the chapter on brainwashing, have little or nothing to do with the lucid chapters on history that precede.

In his introduction, Baumeister acknowledges that the evidence for his arguments lies outside his own field of expertise. Unfortunately, so does his best writing.

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