

Americans find identity in family and accomplishments

August 2, 2019

NASHVILLE—Most Americans say they find their identity in relationships and achievements, according to a new study.

[LifeWay Research](#) asked more than 1,000 Americans about their sense of identity and what matters most about themselves.

Few Americans say religion in general or faith in Christ specifically is at the forefront of their identity.

Who do you think you are?

Researchers asked the open-ended question, “When you think about who you are, what are the first three things that come to mind?” Only 8 percent say Christian. Fewer say religious/spiritual (2 percent), child of God (2 percent) or blessed (1 percent).

More Americans mention being a parent (25 percent), intelligent (12 percent), their job (11 percent), compassionate (11 percent), husband (10 percent), kind (10 percent), trustworthy (10 percent), wife (8 percent), friend (8 percent), hardworking (8 percent) and honest (8 percent).

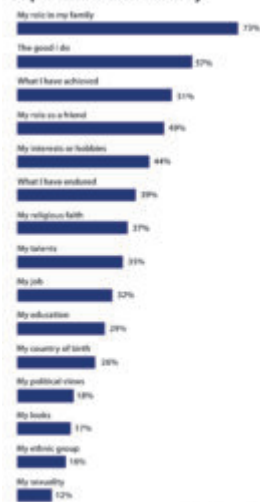
Most characteristics volunteered were positive or merely factual. However, some Americans chose potentially negative traits as one of the first things that came to mind about themselves, such as lonely (4 percent), anxious (2 percent), overweight (1 percent), angry (1 percent), bored (1 percent) or poor (less than 1 percent).

“There is no single lens or identifier Americans use to think of themselves,”

said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. “Ironically, that means the personal identity people have or seek may not be what others see in them.”

What is most important to your identity?

Top 15 markers Americans consider very important to their identity



When given a list of potential facets that could be “very important” to their identity, most respondents point to their role in their family (73 percent) and the good they do (57 percent). Around half say what they have achieved (51 percent) and their role as friend (49 percent) is vital to their identity.

Fewer choose their interests or hobbies (44 percent), what they have endured (39 percent), their religious faith (37 percent), their talents (35 percent), their job (32 percent) or their education (29 percent).

Even fewer point to their country of birth (26 percent), political views (18 percent), looks (17 percent), ethnic group (16 percent), sexuality (12 percent) or favorite sports team (7 percent) as a very important part of their identity.

When asked to choose the most important part of their identity, Americans are most likely to say their familial role (44 percent) is top among those characteristics that are very important.

Around one in six (18 percent) name religious faith as the most important part of their identity. For 10 percent of Americans, the good they do is most vital. Fewer than one in 10 chose any of the other options.

Identity and behavior

The LifeWay Research survey also found Americans evenly split on the relationship between identity and behavior.

Views on identity

Among Americans

What I do determines who I am.

42%

Who I am determines what I do.

42%

Not sure

15%

 LifeWay
Research

LifeWayResearch.com

When asked which statement best described their opinion, 42 percent say, “What I do determines who I am,” and 42 percent say, “Who I am determines what I do.” Around one in seven (15 percent) aren’t sure.

“These two equally common perspectives on life have very different assumptions,” McConnell said. “Working to achieve a reputation presupposes you have less value unless you do. Seeking to genuinely live who you are assumes you had value from the start.”

LifeWay Research conducted the study September 21-23, 2018. Analysts used sample stratification and base weights for gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, metro/non-metro, home ownership, education and income to reflect the most recent U.S. Census data.

The completed sample is 1,010 surveys, providing 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.