“WE KNOW WHAT WE ARE, but not what we may be.” This quote by William Shakespeare portrays a perfect perspective of what identity is like. Identity is the image you make of yourself for society to look at. Unfortunately, sometimes it does not work out the way you want it to. People might not see you the way you want to be seen. Always expect something to occur that will change everything, including your identity. The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Díaz portrays variations in characters that are caused by certain events and circumstances. Díaz, with a unique edge, portrays Oscar, Beli, and Lola’s identities by relating their experiences, relationships, hardships, and their relationships with Dominican culture. Oscar thinks he is surrounded by the fukú—a curse that stays with him his whole life and eventually embeds itself within him. The hardships Oscar’s mother, Beli, faced as a child shape her identity. Lola’s not-so-good relationship with her mother changes her as a person also. As I compare myself to the women in my country, my cultural identity also plays a role in shaping me as a woman. Although the characters live in the United States for most of their lives, they still have a
strong connection with their country of origin, the Dominican Republic.

Originated in the Dominican Republic, the *fukú* follows Oscar his whole life. Oscar Wao has a very tough time recognizing himself and being recognized through most of the times during his life. Oscar is considered the outsider in the novel due to his nerdiness, his intelligence, and his incongruous physical appearance. It is said, “Dude wore his nerdiness like a Jedi wore his light saber or a Lensman her lens. Couldn’t have passed for Normal if he’d wanted to” (21). This quote tells us that Oscar wanted to be different. He did not look “normal” from any angle. To find himself, Oscar writes. Writing is what makes Oscar recognize himself and his talent. He creates this bubble for himself that he always stays in. He wants to make a mark and be known by others. Throughout his life, Oscar seeks the one thing that everyone wants to attain in his or her life, love. He wants to fall in love with someone and also be loved in return. While seeking love, Oscar becomes lost and stops recognizing himself. He becomes so confused that he tries to kill himself twice. All along, Oscar thinks he is “cursed” and that is why he cannot attain happiness. When Oscar finally gets what he wanted all his life, he dies. It was as if the *fukú* becomes part of Oscar’s identity and eventually kills him.

Oscar’s mother Beli also has a hard time seeking her identity. Beli is the one that bridges the Dominican Republic with the United States in the novel. Born and raised in the Dominican Republic and adopted by her father’s cousin, she does not understand the situations she was put in. Beli, just like Oscar, seems to be on a quest to find out where she belongs. She has a very tough time during her childhood. She also goes through a very confusing phase when she is looking for love. She does not know what is right or wrong for her. While having harsh memories from her childhood, Beli has a corrupt relationship with her daughter Lola. The tough times she has been through makes her a very stiff person in life- who is also trying to fight cancer. When Lola runs away, Beli pretends that she is in pain so that Lola would stop. This quote, “*Ya te tengo*, she said, jumping triumphantly to her feet. *Te tengo*” (70), shows us how happy Beli is when she realizes that Lola has come to her. This displays the hidden love Beli had for her daughter. It is said, “Beli at thirteen believed in love like a seventy-year-old widow who’s been abandoned by family, husband, children and fortune believes in God” (88). This quote portrays that Beli has been tough all along, ever since she
was a child. Beli's childhood and youth in the Dominican Republic play a big part in depicting her identity in the book.

Oscar's sister Lola also has a conflicting period where she struggles with her identity. Lola does not get along well with her mother. Like her mother, she also goes through a hard phase in her love life. As Lola says, "You don't know what it's like to grow up with a mother who never said a positive thing in her life, not about her children or the world, who was always suspicious, always tearing you down and splitting your dreams straight down the seams" (56). This quote pretty much sums up Lola's feelings about her mother. Even though Lola's and her mother's relationship was not stable, both of them still cared for each other. Lola's experience with her grandma in the Dominican Republic changes the way she feels about her mother. After her visit to the DR she handles situations by being in them, and fighting against them. She learns: "But if these years have taught me anything it is this: you can never run away. Not ever. The only way out is in" (209).

I come from Pakistan, a country where the literacy rate is not very high and where few women get a chance to seek education. By actually getting a chance to seek education, I feel very accomplished. With education, I have an identity. Many opportunities and experiences in life have taught me to appreciate what I have, because many other people cannot get it even if they try. My education has affected my identity as I am now seen as a unique person in front of other women from back home. It has made me feel proud of myself. Now, I can be seen as a role model for other women who want to seek education in my country.

In The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Diaz, each character's identity evolves with his or her experiences in life. Life's vicissitudes are what identify you as a person. Your nationality unconsciously becomes part of your identity. The fukú stayed with Oscar and became part of his identity by putting him through tough phases. Beli's harsh childhood and youth in the Dominican Republic became a part of her identity and shaped her as a person. Lola's relationship with her mom also became a part of her identity and changed her as she got older. Getting the opportunity to seek an education, something women rarely get a chance to do in my country, has transformed me as a person also. Nobody knows what will change him or her as a person. It can be from the smallest things to the biggest things, even the place where you come from.