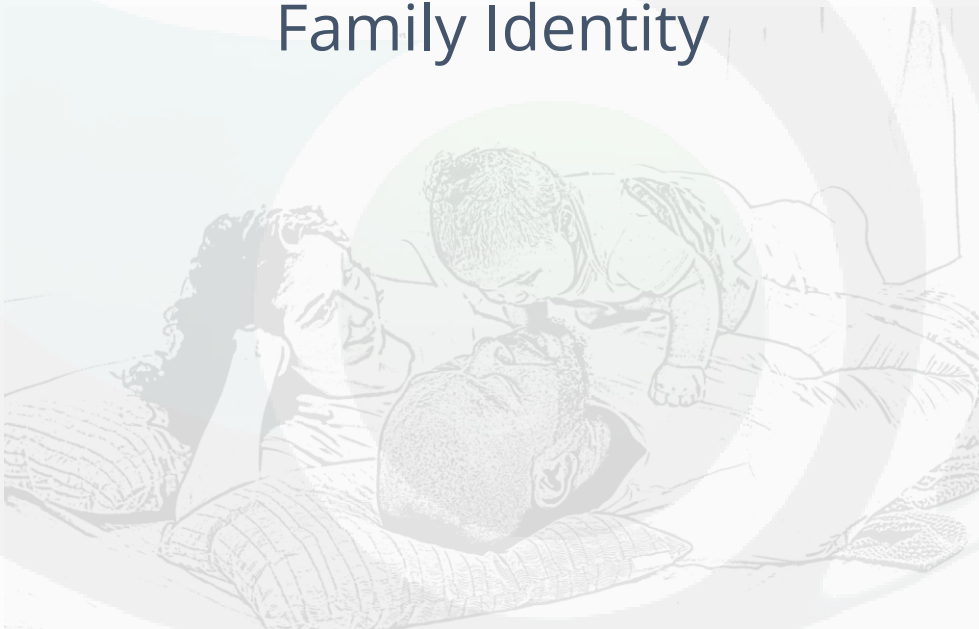


# Supporting Theory Material



## Family Identity



# Family Identity

## Erik Erikson's 8 Life Stages



| Stage                                  | Conflict                    | Virtue           |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------|
| 0-18 month (Infancy)                   | Trust vs. Mistrust          | Hope             |
| 18 month – 3 Years (Early Childhood)   | Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt    | Will / Willpower |
| 3 years – 5 years (Preschool Children) | Initiative vs. Guilt        | Purpose          |
| 5 years – 12 Years (School Children)   | Industry vs. Inferiority    | Competence       |
| 12 years – 18 years (Adolescence)      | Identity vs. Role Confusion | Fidelity         |
| 18 years – 40 years (Young Adulthood)  | Intimacy vs. Isolation      | Love             |
| 40 Years – 65 Years (Middle Age)       | Generativity vs. Stagnation | Care             |
| 65 years -                             | (Ego) Integrity vs. Despair | Wisdom           |

*Erikson, Erik H. Childhood and Society. W.W. Norton & Company, 1963*

### Overview of Erik Erikson's Identity Formation Theory

Erik Erikson's Identity Formation Theory outlines human development through **eight psychosocial stages**, each defined by a key conflict that shapes identity. These stages span the entire lifespan, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between biological, psychological, and social factors in shaping a coherent sense of self.

Central to the theory is the concept of **identity**, which Erikson viewed as a lifelong process shaped by resolving conflicts such as **Trust vs. Mistrust** in infancy or **Identity vs. Role Confusion** during adolescence.

Successfully navigating these crises leads to strengths that support future growth, while unresolved challenges may result in difficulties in later stages.

Unlike Freud's focus on psychosexual development, Erikson emphasized the role of culture, relationships, and society in identity formation. He also believed that while earlier stages lay the foundation, development continues throughout life, with opportunities to revisit and address earlier conflicts.

Erikson's theory highlights the interplay between personal growth and environmental influences, offering a framework to understand how individuals form their identities within broader social contexts. Its relevance across disciplines ensures its continued impact on psychology, education, and counseling.

# Family Identity

## Murray Bowen's 8 Key Concepts

(The 5 most important for family identity are handled in the course)



| Concept  | Explanation  |
|--|--|
| (Nuclear) Family Emotional System                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Identifies the patterns of emotional functions within a single family unit.</li></ul>  |
| Differentiation of Self  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Refers to an individual's ability to separate their own intellectual and emotional functioning from that of their family.</li><li>Highly differentiated individuals can maintain their sense of self while staying emotionally connected to others, whereas poorly differentiated individuals are more likely to be swayed by emotional pressures from the family.</li></ul> |
| Triangles  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Describes a three-person relationship system that forms when tension arises between two family members, and a third person (or issue) is drawn in to reduce anxiety.</li><li>Triangles are the smallest stable unit of relationships, but they can also perpetuate conflict and emotional imbalance if unresolved.</li></ul>   |
| Family Projection Process<br>(Included in Triangles in the course) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Explains how parents transmit their emotional issues, anxieties, and expectations to their children.</li><li>This process can affect a child's development and sense of self, often creating emotional challenges in the next generation.</li></ul>  |
| Emotional Cut-Off  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Describes how individuals manage unresolved emotional issues with their family by reducing or completely cutting off emotional contact.</li><li>Although this can reduce immediate anxiety, it often leads to unresolved tensions being transferred into new relationships or future generations.</li></ul>  |
| Multigenerational Transmission Process                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Highlights how small differences in differentiation between parents and their offspring can accumulate across generations.</li><li>Patterns such as emotional cutoffs or low levels of self differentiation are often repeated through this process.</li></ul>   |
| Sibling Position   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Draws on the idea that birth order influences personality traits and relationship dynamics.</li><li>Bowen believed sibling position affects how individuals function within their families and broader social systems.</li></ul>   |
| Societal Emotional Process   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Extends the principles of family systems theory to society as a whole.</li><li>Suggests that societal forces, like family systems, can experience chronic anxiety and emotional regressions during periods of instability or stress.</li></ul>   |

# Family Identity

## Murray Bowen's 8 Key Concepts

(The 5 most important for family identity are handled in the course)



### Overview of Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory

Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory revolutionized the understanding of human behavior by shifting the focus from individuals to the broader dynamics of families as interconnected emotional systems.

Bowen viewed families as emotional units, where the actions, emotions, and decisions of one member influence the entire system. This relational perspective highlights how families, like other systems, seek balance and adapt to manage stress and anxiety.

A central concept of Bowen's theory is **differentiation of self**, which refers to an individual's ability to maintain their identity and emotional independence while staying connected to the family.

Individuals with a high level of differentiation can make thoughtful decisions even under emotional pressure, whereas those with low differentiation often struggle with enmeshment or detachment, becoming overly reactive to others' emotions or expectations.

Bowen also identified **triangulation** as a common response to family stress. When conflict arises between two members, a third party (such as another family member or an external issue) is drawn in to reduce tension.

While triangles can stabilize relationships temporarily, they often perpetuate conflict and prevent resolution. Closely related is the **family projection process**, through which parents unconsciously pass their emotional concerns or anxieties onto their children, shaping the children's emotional functioning and development.

The **multigenerational process** is another core concept, illustrating how emotional patterns, levels of differentiation, and relationship dynamics are transmitted across generations. For example, unresolved issues in one generation can manifest as emotional challenges or dysfunction in future generations, often repeating in predictable ways.

When individuals feel overwhelmed by family stress, they may resort to **emotional cut-off**, severing or reducing emotional contact with their family to escape anxiety.

While this may bring short-term relief, unresolved tensions are often carried into other relationships, perpetuating dysfunction.

Bowen also explored the role of **sibling position**, asserting that birth order influences how individuals function within families and society, with firstborns, middle children, and youngest siblings often adopting distinct roles.

Bowen extended his theory beyond the family unit with the concept of the **societal emotional process**, which applies family systems principles to larger groups. He argued that societal stress, such as economic or political instability, mirrors family anxiety and affects collective behavior, often leading to regression or dysfunction at a societal level.

Bowen's Family Systems Theory remains a cornerstone of psychotherapy, counseling, and social work. By understanding and addressing systemic patterns of dysfunction, individuals and families can foster healthier interactions, improve emotional resilience, and break cycles of dysfunction that span generations.

In the Family Identity course, 5 key concepts have been selected.

Due to the particular focus on Family Identity, we have chosen to leave out Sibling Position and Societal Impact. The family projection process is included in the Triangulation topic.

# Family Identity

## Vivian L. Vignoles

### Motivated Identity Construction Theory



| Concept         | Motivation   |
|-----------------|--|
| Belonging       | The motivation to feel accepted and included in social groups.                                     |
| Distinctiveness | The drive to feel unique or different from others.   |
| Self-Esteem     | Self-Esteem  |
| Continuity      | The need to maintain a sense of connection to one's past, present, and future self.                |
| Efficacy        | The need to feel competent and capable of influencing outcomes.                                    |
| Meaning         | An add-on to the original theory. The desire to feel that one's life has purpose and significance. |

Schwartz, Seth J., Koen Luyckx, and Vivian L. Vignoles, editors. *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*. Springer, 2011

## Overview of Vivian Vignoles' Motivated Identity Construction Theory

Vivian Vignoles' **Motivated Identity Construction Theory** explains identity formation as an active, goal-driven process guided by six universal psychological motivations: **belonging**, **distinctiveness**, **self-esteem**, **continuity**, **efficacy**, and **meaning**.

These motivations shape how individuals construct their identities and navigate their relationships with the world.

**Belonging** centers on the need for social acceptance and connection, whereas **distinctiveness** emphasizes individuality and the drive to feel unique .

**Self-esteem** reflects the need to feel valuable and worthy, while **continuity** ensures a consistent sense of self over time, connecting past, present, and future.

**Efficacy** involves feeling competent and in control, and **meaning** focuses on finding purpose and significance in life.

Although these motivations are universal, their expression and priority differ across cultures. For instance, individualistic societies often prioritize distinctiveness and efficacy, while collectivistic cultures emphasize belonging and continuity.

Vignoles highlights the dynamic interplay between these motivations, noting that tensions can arise when fulfilling one conflicts with another, such as balancing distinctiveness with belonging.

This type of dual dynamic is also present in Shalom H. Schwarz' universal values, which is presented in the *Family Values Super Power Course*.

Through global research, Vignoles demonstrated how identity is shaped by personal goals and cultural contexts, making it both universal and adaptable. His theory offers a nuanced perspective on identity as a fluid process that reflects both individual aspirations and sociocultural influences, helping explain how people navigate their sense of self in an increasingly interconnected world. Vignoles' theory is normally being used in a business context, however the dynamics around personal goals and societal context are translatable to families. Vignoles' concepts are overlapping to both Erik Erikson's identity formation theory and Murray Bowen's family systems theory, though more focused on identity construction as an conscious act. Especially the chosen concepts of belonging, distinctiveness and self-esteem fit very well to the conscious act of establishing a family identity.