



Identity

As complex beings, we can see ourselves in different ways depending on the setting; however, our ego identity can permit us to merge different aspects of being into a continuous sense of who we are. Rather than being finite with separate components, our identity evolves, blending aspects of our biology, experiences, and behaviours to form who we currently are.

Identity formation (or individuation) is the development of the individual's distinct understanding of self (morals, values, beliefs, experiences, etc.) in particular stages of life—especially strong in adolescence but throughout life too. Whilst our identity can be fluid, it can also be unique and affiliated with and influenced by groups: For instance, culture, professional, ethnic and nationality, religious, gender, ability, and interpersonal (whereby we categorise, label, and compare).

Our identity formation is influenced by many factors, but some factors are particularly influential.

Parental influences: having secure and authoritative parental influences can help one feel free, certain, confident, and safe to explore options and express themselves. Such gives young people the space to grow and develop identity at a quicker, stronger pace than they otherwise might.

Cognitive influences: having the ability to think in abstract and logical ways can help adolescents consider and explore options for themselves. As cognitive maturity develops, resolving identity issues or crises becomes more achievable thereby enhancing abilities to resolve next issue or crisis. The sooner this process gets started, the better.

Academic influences: people experience their schooling years in positive or negative ways (whether that's with the environment, peers, faculty members, or, indeed, education itself) and it can affect confidence, ability to think, and set one on a path for professional identity.

Sociocultural influences: times have changed and people are freer and more equipt than they once were to adopt ideas, beliefs, jobs, activities, and ways of life. But just like there are differences between generations regarding people's experiences, there are also differences between cultures (families, communities, groups) which can help to explain different identity shifts of "acceptable" behavioural repertoires amongst groups.

Online influences: the internet can be an extension of oneself where people explore ideas, personality, philosophies, etc. and reflect on the reactions of others whereby social approval and belonging is equally (or more) important as it offline.

Although there are several theories outlining identity formation, here are two.

Erik Erikson stated that throughout life (at certain points) we face "crises" or conflicts which we must resolve to successfully navigate it and to be equipt to navigate the next stage of his Psychosocial Theory of Development.

Starting in adolescence, the 5th Stage (8 in total), "Identity versus Role Confusion" states that people attempt to ascertain who they are to form a basic identity from which to build throughout life. This stage is resolved when goals and values are worked out, accepted or rejected, and/or fulfilled and one comprehends own uniqueness as a person.

James Marcia stated that adolescents fit one of four statuses of identity as measured by exploration of and commitment to values, morals, religion, work, politics, sexuality, etc. The four categorises can help to locate ones progression into achieving identity.



Marcia's four categories of the Identity Status Theory are:

1. Identity diffusion: Not yet thought or resolved identity issues and has failed to chart future directions. "I haven't thought much about God, I don't know what I believe."
2. Foreclosure: Committed to an identity without experiencing a crisis of deciding what suits oneself. "My father always voted FF and I'll always vote FF."
3. Moratorium: Identity crisis. Seeking questions and answers about life commitments. "I'm evaluating my beliefs to see what's right for me. I like lots of my Catholic rearing but I'm also sceptical about some teachings. I like a lot of what the Anglican Church teaches too."
4. Identity achievement: Resolved identity issues by making personal commitments to goals, beliefs, values, and people. "After a lot of reflecting about my religion I have finally decided what I believe in."

Erikson' Theory of Psychosocial Development.

Approx' age	Stages of crisis	Important events	Erikson's viewpoint: significant events and social influences
Birth to 1 year	Trust vs. Mistrust	Feeding	Children develop a sense of trust when caregivers provide reliability, care, and affection. A lack of this will lead to mistrust.
1 to 3 years	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Toilet Training	Children need to develop a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence. Success leads to feelings of autonomy, failure results in feelings of shame and doubt.
3 to 5 years	Initiative vs. Guilt	Exploration	Children need to begin asserting control and power over the environment. Success in this stage leads to a sense of purpose. Children who try to exert too much power experience disapproval, resulting in a sense of guilt.
6 to 11 years	Industry vs. Inferiority	School	Children need to cope with new social and academic demands. Success leads to a sense of competence, while failure results in feelings of inferiority.
12 to 18 years	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Social Relationships	Teens need to develop a sense of self and personal identity. Success leads to an ability to stay true to yourself, while failure leads to role confusion and a weak sense of self.
19 to 40 years	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Relationships	Young adults need to form intimate, loving relationships with other people. Success leads to strong relationships, while failure results in loneliness and isolation.
40 to 65 years	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Work and Parenthood	Adults need to create or nurture things that will outlast them, often by having children or creating a positive change that benefits other people. Success leads to feelings of usefulness and accomplishment, while failure results in shallow involvement in the world.
65 years to death	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Reflection on Life	Older adults need to look back on life and feel a sense of fulfilment. Success at this stage leads to feelings of wisdom, while failure results in regret, bitterness, and despair.