



2. WHAT IS IDENTITY?



*Who am I?
Is there an end to that knowing?
How can you tell what lies beneath the glowing?
Have I gone deep enough inside,
can the sinful human eye see what truth may hide?
How do I know if I've touched the core,
are there still dark corners unexplored?
Have I stepped into every hidden space,
is there something there my heart cannot face?
Is it worth going on,
what messages is my being sending, what song?
"Stay where you are – don't shake it, don't move!"
Every person is like a house of cards,
fragile, worn, not holding truth in their regard.
But if I stop, I fear I'll deceive myself,
for what is life without the quest itself?
Wouldn't I die a conscious death
if that search lost its breath?
Each answer gives birth to another unknown,
a constant battle inside, never alone.
Should I close my eyes or rush ahead,
toward my essence – alone, in silence – led?*

Before we dive into the practical aspects of the model, it is important to understand the theoretical frameworks that support this process of personal development. In the context of *My Identity Journey*, theoretical models serve as a useful map – helping us not only understand the model itself, but also transform insights and discoveries into concrete action steps that move us toward achieving desired results.

Identity is a story in constant creation – a collection of roles and characteristics that carry emotional responses, shaping how we see ourselves and how others see us. Although it may seem stable, identity is in fact dynamic and changeable. It adapts to situations, relationships, and experiences we go through. Sometimes it changes slowly, and other times, in just a few hours, we may feel change after change... when, for example, in the morning we wake up as a parent, at noon function as a professional, and in the evening question who we really are.

In this program we will use a simple yet comprehensive definition: **Identity is a dynamic and multidimensional concept that encompasses the ways in which we perceive ourselves.** It consists of physical, social, psychological, and intuitive aspects, and its dynamic nature means that it constantly evolves and changes – sometimes slowly and imperceptibly, and other times rapidly and dramatically.

To understand it more deeply, we will draw on different theoretical concepts and perspectives that explore how identity is shaped by social interactions, inner conflicts, values, and personal aspirations. These concepts help us more easily accept the fluidity of identity and better understand the ever-present need for meaning, belonging, and authenticity.

But theory is only the foundation – the first step. Real change comes through application, through experience, through what we do after the insights we gain. That is why, alongside theoretical concepts, this book emphasizes practice: concrete action steps and the testing of new, different behaviors.

2.1. Theoretical Foundations

Symbolic Interactionism: Identity through the Eyes of Others

How many times have you searched for the answer to the question “*Who am I?*” in the reactions of other people? Perhaps without even realizing it, each time we see ourselves reflected in others – in their praise, criticism, smiles, or rejection – we shape a part of who we are.

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) and Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) are two key figures in the development of **social interactionism**, particularly **symbolic interactionism**, a school of thought in sociology and social psychology. Mead laid the foundations of symbolic interactionism, emphasizing that identity arises through social interaction and the individual’s ability to see themselves through the eyes of others. His student, Herbert Blumer, gave this school its name and developed it further, highlighting that people act toward others or events based on the meanings they attach to those people and events. The meanings we give to people and events emerge and change in our interaction with them.

Together, Mead and Blumer provided a framework for understanding how we create ourselves and, consequently, influence the world around us through processes of everyday interaction and communication.

As children, we learn who we are through the reactions of our parents. Later, through friendships, school, work, and relationships, we continue to shape our identity – adopting, rejecting, or modifying parts of ourselves based on feedback from the external world. For example, if a child shows a drawing to their parents and receives a positive reaction, delight, and applause – even if the child had never thought of themselves as an artist

– through such interaction, they receive a positive signal that becomes part of their self-image.

According to this theory, **identity is fluid – it adapts to circumstances, people, and the roles we assume**. Depending on who we are with and what kind of relationship we have, our behavior changes – and with it, our self-perception. We may feel confident among friends, but insecure in a new work environment. We may feel competent in one role and completely lost in another. Every interaction leaves a mark, either validating part of us or calling it into question and reshaping it.

If identity is truly the product of social interactions, then it is never a finished product. We have the power to shape it, to question the stories we tell ourselves and others about who we are.

Erikson and Life Stages

Have you ever wondered when you began to believe in what you today consider to be yourself? Why have some insecurities from childhood never completely disappeared, while other stages of life passed almost unnoticed?

Erik Erikson (1902–1994) was a psychologist who deepened our understanding of identity development across the entire lifespan. Known for his model of psychosocial development, Erikson demonstrated how each stage of life carries key challenges for shaping our sense of self. His most renowned contribution is the introduction of the “identity crisis” concept, a natural process through which an individual explores who they are, what they want, and how they relate to the world. Erikson connected internal processes of growth with social expectations, revealing just how dynamic, continuous, and contextually connected identity development truly is.

Through his theory of psychosocial development, Erikson identified eight key stages that we pass through, each with a specific challenge that needs to be resolved in order to move into the next stage of life in a healthy way.