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Identity's Multifaceted Nature: An Integrated Framework

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Abstract Rather than a singular construct, identity is a dynamic interplay of multiple dimensions. Existing theories have examined identity formation through psychosocial, cultural, and political perspectives; however, they often address these aspects separately and overlook their interconnected nature. To address this gap, this article introduces an integrated framework, redefining identity as a multifaceted construct. It analyzes how different dimensions of identity intersect to provide insights into the mechanisms through which identities are constructed, perceived, and applied within diverse social contexts. Moreover, it discusses the importance of aligning the definitions of identity dimensions within a society. It elucidates that societal stability and well-being will improve when individual, social, political, and psychometric identities are closely set. Conversely, serious social and political challenges such as mass migration may result from significant mismatches between these definitions. Through this integrated framework, this article contributes to the broader discourse on identity perception as well as its implications for social interactions and the ways human experiences are affected by identities.

Keywords: *Identity perspectives, Individual identity, Social identity, Political identity, Psychometric identity*

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1. Introduction

Identity, an integral concept for understanding self-perception and societal positioning, has garnered significant scholarly attention across diverse academic realms. While commonly used, the term "identity" carries a range of conceptual meanings and theoretical applications. This variability persists even when the focus is on sociology and social psychology (Stryker & Burke, 2000). While some equate identity with cultural affiliations, blurring the boundaries with concepts like race and ethnicity (Spencer, 2014), others define it as a collective identification with social groups, a stance notably emphasized in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Moreover, some, such as Identity Theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000), view

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identity as a construct derived from the meanings individuals ascribe to their various roles in today's highly differentiated societies.

Identities manifest at the micro-level of society but are deeply entrenched within meso-level and macro-level cultural, social, and political frameworks. Individuals exercise agency as they navigate situations at the micro-level. This agency functions at the individual and group levels. Despite individual agency, social structures can impose constraints on individual actions (Burke & Stets, 2023). Moreover, according to the existing identity literature, individuals' self-conceptions and sense of belonging derived from group affiliations and political beliefs contribute to the formation of their political identity. One research strand of political identity focuses on national identity, patriotism, and multiculturalism (Citrin et al., 2001), while another discusses broader social categorizations, such as race, ethnicity, and gender (Tajfel, 1981; Turner et al., 1987), which can significantly influence political perspectives and behaviors. In addition to cultural, social, and political perspectives, psychometric attributes associated with identity processes can be crucial in understanding identity dynamics. For example, Christiaens et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of context-specific identity measurement, particularly about school transitions, as these periods are critical for identity development.

The emergence of social and political identities necessitates a theoretical perspective to advance the study of the multifaceted nature of identity (Huddy, 2001). However, a review of the related literature shows that the attention given to individual, social, political, and psychometric identities has not been followed up by studies that describe how the association between them occurs and by what processes these associations affect society and its members. In other words, the literature does not sufficiently represent a dynamic perspective that explains how identity layers evolve from individual, social, political, and psychometric identity interactions.

Taken together, the exploration of identity theories underscores the fluid nature of the term and stresses the significance of embracing diverse perspectives to fully grasp its intricacies. From cultural and ethnic associations to social categorizations and individual self-construction, identity encapsulates various meanings that necessitate meticulous examination. Despite the broad spectrum of identity theories, no study to date has offered a truly integrative model that synthesizes psychological, sociological, political, and empirical dimensions of identity. To fill this gap, we propose an integrated framework that provides a comprehensive overview of identity, including individual, social, political, and psychometric perspectives. By elucidating these perspectives, we aim to foster a deeper understanding of how identity is shaped and utilized in various contexts. In the subsequent sections, we provide a comprehensive review of prominent identity theories and then define the four perspectives on identity within our framework. Finally, we discuss the multifaceted nature of identity and its profound impact on human experiences and social dynamics.

2. Identity

Identity is a dynamic construct that affects individuals' interactions with the world around them. The evolution of identity theories is mirrored by the variations in sociological, psychoanalytic, psychological, and historical perspectives on identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Symbolic Interactionism is an early theoretical foundation of identity, which is rooted in the works of Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934). This theory focuses on the role of social interactions and the meanings individuals attribute to them in developing their identity (Alver & Caglar, 2015). Symbolic interactionism highlights the importance of symbols in human communication. Unlike approaches that focus on the influence of social institutions (macro level, from the 'top-down'), symbolic interactionism prioritizes understanding how individuals interpret their subjective experiences and construct their realities (micro level, from the 'bottom-up'). This perspective concerns subjective meanings derived from repeated interactions rather than objective structures (Carter & Fuller, 2016). The core principles of symbolic interactionism include: (1) individuals' actions are based on the meanings they attribute to objects; (2) interactions occur within specific social and cultural contexts where individual meanings define objects and situations; (3) meanings arise from social interactions; and (4) these meanings are continuously shaped and reshaped through interpretive processes during interactions (Blumer, 1969).

Moving into the mid-20th century, Erikson (1959, 1968, 1982) introduced his Psychosocial Development Theory. He focused on identity development across eight life stages, from infancy to old age, highlighting the importance of adolescence and social relationships. Each stage, including basic trust vs. mistrust (0–1½ years), autonomy vs. shame and doubt (1½–3 years), initiative vs. guilt (3–5 years), industry vs. inferiority (6–11 years), identity vs. role confusion (12–18 years), intimacy vs. isolation (19–40 years), generativity vs. stagnation (40–65 years), and integrity vs. despair (65 to death), presents unique challenges or crises (Demirezen, 2010). According to Erikson (1959), an identity crisis is a period marked by uncertainty and confusion, during which an individual's sense of identity becomes unstable, typically due to changes in societal roles or personal goals. He identified three forms of identity crisis: (1) Severe, characterized by overwhelming identity confusion; (2) Prolonged, marked by an extended period of realigning childhood identifications; and (3) Aggravated, involving repeated unsuccessful attempts at resolution. Successfully resolving these challenges is essential for developing a stable and coherent sense of self, leading to a more resilient identity and healthy psychological growth (Demirezen, 2010).

Marcia (1966) built on Erikson's (1959) work with his Identity Status Theory, identifying four identity statuses (achieved, foreclosed, moratorium, and diffuse) based on commitment (i.e., engagement in particular ideological positions) and exploration (i.e., actively experimenting with or evaluating various roles), providing a practical framework for assessing identity development in adolescents (Koepke & Denissen, 2012). Achieved identity status is characterized by actively exploring different options and making informed decisions about one's identity. In moratorium status, individuals are gathering information and considering various possibilities before making a commitment. Foreclosure status involves adopting the values and beliefs of others, such as one's parents or authority figures, without exploring alternatives. Finally, individuals in diffusion status lack commitment and have minimal or no exploration of identity options (Kroger, 2017).

Around the same time, Tajfel (1978) and Tajfel and Turner (1979) developed the Social Identity Theory, exploring how group memberships and social categories influence individual identity and intergroup behavior. Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggested that human interactions exist on a continuum from purely interpersonal to purely intergroup. In a purely interpersonal interaction, which they consider rare, individuals engage with each other solely as unique persons without recognizing social categories. Conversely, in a purely intergroup interaction, individuals interact primarily as representatives of their social groups, with personal characteristics being overshadowed by group identities. They argued that movement along this continuum from interpersonal to intergroup interactions leads to changes in self-perception and the perception of others. At the interpersonal end, individuals' self-concepts are primarily composed of their unique attitudes, memories, emotions, and behaviors, distinguishing them from others, referred to as 'personal identity.' On the other hand, at the intergroup end, self-concept is primarily defined by 'social identity,' which includes the aspects of an individual's self-image derived from their social group memberships and associated emotional and evaluative implications. Moreover, the underlying motivation for favoring one's own group over outgroups is the desire for a positive and secure self-concept (Hornsey, 2008).

Self-categorization Theory, an extension of Social Identity Theory, examines how individuals categorize themselves at different levels and how this categorization influences their behavior (Turner, 1978; Turner et al., 1987). While Social Identity Theory underscored the influence of cognitive, motivational, and socio-historical factors on intergroup relations, Self-categorization Theory attempted to refine the cognitive aspect of Social Identity Theory and extend its scope to include intragroup processes as well. This attempt led to the development of the Social Identity Approach, which encompasses both Social Identity Theory and Self-categorization Theory, acknowledging their distinct focuses (Hornsey, 2008). Revisiting the categorization process central to Social Identity Theory, Self-categorization Theory proposed that identity operates at various levels of inclusiveness. Subsequently, three levels of self-categorization were identified as crucial to self-concept (Turner et al., 1987): the superordinate level (human identity), the intermediate level (social identity), and the subordinate level (personal identity). Human identity refers to categorizing the self as a human being. Social identity involves self-descriptions related to group memberships or self-categorizations, and personal identity encompasses self-descriptions based on individual attributes. Thus, the self is understood as being

shaped by personal and social identities (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Activating a particular social identity in a given context depends on accessibility and fit. Fit is assessed by how accurately social categories mirror perceived social realities. For instance, individuals might perceive a high level of fit if the distinctions between categories highlight intercategory differences while reducing intracategory differences, known as comparative fit. Additionally, a category distinction is likely to be seen as fitting if social behaviors and group memberships align with stereotypical expectations, referred to as normative fit (Hornsey, 2008).

Identity theories expanded further with contributions such as Identity Theory by Stryker and Burke (2000). This theory emerged from symbolic interactionism and focused on the role of social structures in identity formation. It introduced key concepts such as identity salience, prominence, and commitment as identity characteristics emerging from the perceptual control processes that ensure identity verification (Burke, 2023). Identity Theory indicates that the chance of a particular identity being expressed during social interactions is primarily determined by how salient that identity is compared to others that the person holds. The concept of salience refers to how likely it is for a specific identity to be brought up in social situations (Stryker, 1968, 2003, as cited in Brenner et al., 2014) or to a solid inclination to view situations in a way that allows for the expression of that identity (Stryker & Serpe, 1982, as cited in Brenner et al., 2014; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Prominence refers to the degree to which an identity shares meanings with other identities rather than as an internal evaluation of its importance. When meanings are shared across multiple identities, verifying these shared meanings influences many identities. Consequently, individuals are more motivated to verify their more prominent identity and experience more significant distress when it is not verified (Burke, 2023). Commitment is related to role partners and developed through mutual verification processes where individuals confirm each other's identities during interactions (Burke, 2023).

Another significant perspective on identity is Narrative Identity Theory (McAdams, 1985, 2001), which emphasizes the role of personal narratives and life stories in shaping identity. This theory posits that individuals construct their identities through the stories they tell about their lives. It combines their reconstructed past and envisioned future, providing a sense of coherence and purpose to their life (McAdams & McLean, 2013). McAdams (1985), expanding on Erikson's (1959) theory of psychosocial development, proposed that narrative identity starts to form during late adolescence and early adulthood (stage five of the psychosocial development process), and societal expectations about identity and the maturation of advanced cognitive abilities influence this development.

In the same era, Collier and Thomas (1988) defined cultural identity as how individuals perceive themselves in connection with specific cultural groups. In forming a cultural identity, individuals adopt a distinct worldview and participate in practices that link them to a particular society (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Miller & Collette, 2019). The extent to which a person identifies with a culture influences their behavior, with stronger identification leading to greater adherence to that culture's norms (Jetten et al., 2002). Cultural identities differ across three main interconnected dimensions: (1) scope, which refers to how widely an identity can be shared among individuals; (2) salience, which indicates the importance of the identity in a specific context compared to other identities; and (3) intensity, which describes the strength with which identity is expressed (Collier & Thomas, 1988).

Home culture attachment (HCA) is a concept intertwined with cultural identity. It refers to how individuals feel connected and identified with their native cultural heritage. It is often examined in terms of how they preserve their cultural values, beliefs, and practices, particularly when they encounter or reside in different cultural settings (Pishghadam & Kamyabi, 2009). Pishghadam et al. (2013) determined the factors underlying HCA as Religious, Western, Iranian, Cultural, and Artistic attachment. Religious attachment pertains to individuals' beliefs regarding the observance of religious rites. Western attachment is an individual's affinity for Western culture. Iranian attachment is individuals' appreciation for Iran's historical heritage. Cultural attachment is an individual's connection to various aspects of traditional culture, such as architecture and music. Artistic attachment refers to how individuals find Western films appealing and meaningful and prefer reading Western stories over Persian ones (Pishghadam et al., 2013).

Regarding the context of Iran, Karimifard (2012) distinguished three types of Iranian cultural identity as particularly salient. They include, first, Pan-Iranism or national identity, which is rooted in the pre-Islamic Iranian civilization; second, Pan-Islamism or religious identity, which pertains to the period following the advent of Islam in Iran; and third, modernism or modern identity, which emerged with the introduction of modernity into the country. The diversity among these core components has led to social and political conflicts, contributing to what is known as the Iranian identity crisis (Mozaffari, 2014; Saboori et al., 2015).

These theories – from symbolic interactionism to identity status and social identity models – form a conceptual continuum. This reflects a shift from internal cognitive processes to larger societal, cultural, and institutional dynamics. The layered progression demonstrates how identity is constructed both psychologically and sociopolitically (Hornsey, 2008; Stryker & Burke, 2000). The evidence reviewed here suggests that while existing identity theories provide valuable insights into the construction of identity, they often keep their attention directed at distinct conceptual boundaries. Such fragmentation limits the appreciation of identity as a fluid, multi-layered phenomenon that is shaped by overlapping influences. The review of the identity theories demonstrates the necessity for an integrated framework that synthesizes different perspectives. In this study, we propose a comprehensive framework that accounts for identity's multifaceted nature by redefining and bridging multiple perspectives on identity.

3. An Integrated Framework for Identity

Prior studies have noted the dynamic nature of identity, shaped by individual experiences and social contexts. In this paper, we elucidate identity's 'multiple' nature by introducing an integrated framework that encompasses four interrelated perspectives on identity: Individual, Social, Political, and Psychometric (Figure 1). A detailed discussion of each perspective is provided in the following sections.

Figure 1
Identity's Multiple Nature

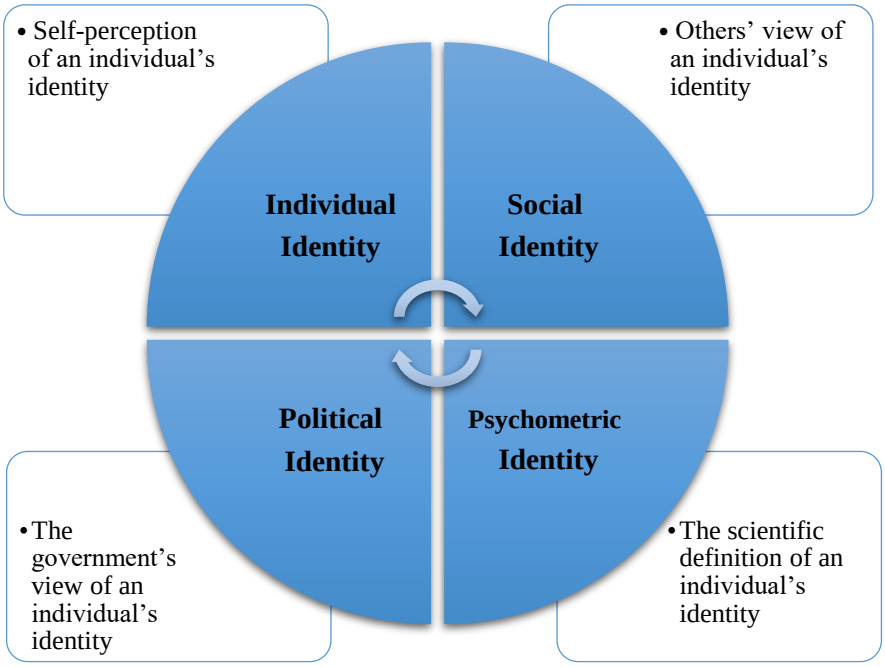

Figure 1 illustrates the multifaceted nature of identity, denoting that each dimension dynamically influences the others. For example, political structures can shape social belonging, or psychometric insights can challenge or affirm individuals' self-perception.

3.1. Individual Perspective

Individual identity refers to an individual's self-perception of their identity, including their characteristics, values, beliefs, and experiences. The individual perspective on identity emphasizes the role of family upbringing and educational attainment in the personal introspection involved in forming one's self-concept. These internal factors significantly shape how individuals relate to the overarching narratives of identity. For example, an individual may view their identity in terms of their adherence to their home cultural practices. Therefore, they may develop a unique individual identity that welcomes globalization while simultaneously embracing their cultural roots. In this case, the individual may regard themselves as a patriot (national identity) who values cultural heritage while appreciating the benefits of cultural exchange and global collaboration.

3.2. Social Perspective

Social identity refers to others' view of an individual's identity within societal norms and values. Social categorizations based on religion and community affiliation mainly influence this form of identity. That is, an individual's alignment with religious affiliations or ethnic backgrounds significantly determines the societal perception of their identity. For example, others may frame the identity of the person who embraces globalization around modernity values. As a result, this person may face challenges related to stereotypes with religious affiliations.

3.3. Political Perspective

From a political perspective, the role of the government in constructing and reinforcing identity categories is paramount. Political identity is shaped by adherence to specific ideologies that are often perpetuated through legislation and educational curricula. Thus, one's position within a broader societal power structure often reflects one's political identity, which is subject to change with shifts in governmental policies or political climates. For example, in the context of Iran, the country's foundational ideologies promote an Islamic identity as integral to Iranian nationalism and frame political discourse around Islamic values. In such a context, non-Islamic identities may be marginalized and conflict with Pan-Iranism, or they may be identified with modernism. Consequently, this misalignment between individual and political identity dimensions leads to an identity crisis within the individuals.

3.4. Psychometric Perspective

Psychometric identity is derived from the insights from standardized tests designed to quantify aspects of an individual's identity. It is grounded in empirical data and measurable traits based on the scientific definition of identity. A comprehensive analysis of personality traits, cognitive abilities, and emotional intelligence is yielded by identity assessments, which provide individuals with a detailed profile of how they perceive themselves. While psychometric approaches are grounded in positivist traditions emphasizing objectivity and measurement (Christiaens et al., 2022), interpretive frameworks such as symbolic interactionism and narrative identity are informed by constructivist epistemologies. These perspectives frame identity as fluid, context-bound, and co-constructed through discourse and interaction.

The four perspectives on identity (Table 1) often intersect in complex ways in real-life situations. For example, regarding workplace dynamics, an employee might see themselves as a dedicated worker (Individual), be recognized as a team leader (Social), hold a managerial position (Political), and be identified as highly conscientious through a personality test (Psychometric). From an individual perspective, the employee's self-concept includes their professional skills, work ethic, and career aspirations. Socially, colleagues and supervisors perceive the employee through their role, teamwork, and organizational contributions. Politically, organizational policies, job titles, and legal employment status influence the employee's identity. Finally, psychometric assessments highlight the employee's identity strengths and identify areas for development.

Table 1
Four Identity Perspectives

Identity Perspective	Description
Individual	It refers to identity as a personal and subjective experience, focusing on self-concept and values.
Social	It refers to the shared understanding of an individual's identity, shaped by how others interpret it within societal norms and values.
Political	This perspective highlights the government's influence in shaping, supporting, or questioning identity categories.
Psychometric	This perspective relies on the scientific understanding of identity, anchoring it in quantifiable characteristics.

4. Concluding Remarks

This study underscores the complex and evolving nature of identity construction and emphasizes that identity is not only dynamic but also inherently multiple. It suggests that various identity roles, each shaped by distinct perspectives, are embodied by individuals concurrently and provides a comprehensive framework for understanding identity's multifaceted nature by introducing four analytical lenses. The individual perspective centers on self-perception grounded in personal attributes and experiences. The social perspective highlights the collective interpretations shaped by societal norms. The political perspective reveals the influence of institutional structures and policies on identity formation. The psychometric perspective offers quantifiable insights through standardized measures.

These perspectives reveal the multiple layers of identity that interact with one another. It is worth noting that while individual identity is often influenced by social and political definitions in various societies, psychometric definitions are frequently overlooked. In this study, we suggest that the smaller the gap between individual, social, political, and psychometric definitions, the healthier the society will be. In contrast, if these definitions do not match each other, it may give rise to considerable social consequences. For example, considering getting a job, if the political definition of identity in a society differs from an individual's self-concept, it can lead to inconsistency and conflict within them. Therefore, to survive within the system, they may be forced to play roles in the workplace, lose something valuable to secure the job, refuse to accept the political definition of identity, emigrate, or accept differences and integrate with the system.

This interplay between identity conflicts and social consequences is in agreement with Pishghadam et al.'s (2021) discussion of sapioemotionality. This concept emphasizes the critical role of emotional reactions in shaping a society's perception of the elite (Kakar, 2024; Pishghadam, 2021). By challenging the dominance of traditional psychometric measures and incorporating political, social, and individual perspectives, this multidimensional view has enriched the discourse on intelligence. Consequently, the alignment of intelligence perspectives with those of identity is a major contributor to a coherent understanding of the self and social interaction. On the other hand, misalignments, such as differences between the psychometric and social definitions of intelligence, can lead to identity conflicts, which negatively affect meritocratic systems and social cohesion.

Moreover, taking into account contexts such as migration in which cultural adaptation is crucial, the identity perspectives proposed in this paper can significantly correlate with magnitude thinking. Magnitude thinking refers to the cognitive ability to judge the relative magnitudes of different entities, which often requires critical analysis (Pishghadam, 2025). Individuals' perception of themselves and their social world can mainly be influenced by magnitude thinking because it encourages individuals to assess the impact of their identity-related challenges more accurately. For example, it helps migrants manage their identity shifts, which are under the influence of language and culture (Pishghadam, 2025), by providing a deeper understanding of the host culture's view of the identity perspectives. In this regard, further studies can examine the interaction between magnitude thinking and cultural backgrounds and social contexts in shaping individual and social identities. Additionally, they can explore the influence of magnitude thinking on the development of political identity. Meanwhile, it is

essential to acknowledge that scholars' own cultural standpoints may influence their interpretation of identity. Therefore, in line with current trends in qualitative and interpretive research, reflexivity is needed to enhance analytical depth (Salamanca González, 2015).

The insights from this study have practical implications for fields such as education, migration studies, organizational development, and political discourse, which need to recognize the multifaceted nature of identity to promote inclusivity and adaptability (Pishghadam et al., 2022). Interdisciplinary approaches have explored the intersection of migration, ethnicity, social mobility, and political contexts to shape identity in nuanced ways (Fadeeva, 2024; Pishghadam, 2025). However, such approaches can address complex social phenomena by bridging individual experiences, social group dynamics, political influences, and measurable psychological traits. In sum, the proposed integrative framework in this study contributes to identity scholarship by challenging soloed approaches and advocating for a systemic, interdisciplinary understanding that bridges theory with practice across diverse cultural and political contexts.

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