

Family Legacies

Understanding and exploring one's family background can be a powerful experience. A number of family theories in the field use family history as an integral part of the growing process. Brownian theory in particular focuses on family legacies, patterns, and self-differentiation.

One helpful way to understand your personal family is through a three generation genogram. A genogram is similar to a family tree, yet, it adds new symbols that represent communication, levels of closeness, difficulties, and strengths.

Here are a few definitions that are helpful in thinking about your family. Each family has certain patterns of behavior. As you contemplate about your family, think about positive and negative patterns that have occurred. For example, there are communication patterns, marital patterns, discipline patterns, work patterns, gender role patterns, religious patterns, health patterns, emotional patterns, and more.

Family legacies are positive family patterns that you would like to keep in your family and carry on to the next generation.

Self-Differentiation is the ability to separate yourself from the negative patterns that occur in your family. In a sense, self-differentiation allows you to become your own self. This may mean you still agree with many of your family's ways, but you agree because you want to. You do not feel pressured to be one way over the other. You are making decisions as an adult in regards to self-identity, self-esteem, spirituality, politics, values, etc. Self-differentiation is important to move forward through each generation.

A transitional character is a person that comes along in a family and changes in a way that creates a new pattern for generations to come. For example, if there is a history of abusive fathers in a family, and a son comes along and chooses not to be like his father and grandfather, then he becomes a transitional character as he influences his children and children's children. This can be very powerful because of how many people are connected to the influence of the transitional character.

Take some time to think about your family. This season can be a time to examine the strengths, areas of improvement, and future directions of your past, present, and future family