FACING UNCERTAINTY: THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDENTITIES
Enfrentar a Incerteza: O Papel da Família no Desenvolvimento de Identidade(s)

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ABSTRACT
Families are agents of primary socialisation that influence the system of beliefs and attitudes regarding the perception of self and others, being crucial for the development of inclusive identity(ies) since childhood. Using the identification of cultural characteristics based on uncertainty avoidance, principles of resilience and the consideration of transnational families as an example to study interculturality, this paper intends to reflect on diversity as an advantage. It is suggested that the creation of empathy reduces social prejudices and thereby engenders a future with more equity.
KEYWORDS: Uncertainty Avoidance. Resilience. Families. Empathy.

RESUMO
A família verifica-se como agente de socialização primária que influencia o sistema de crenças e atitudes relativas à perceção de si e dos outros, sendo crucial para criação de identidade(s) inclusivas logo desde a infância. Com recurso à identificação de características culturais assentes no evitamento perante a incerteza, princípios da resiliência, bem como a consideração de famílias transnacionais como exemplo, pretende-se refletir sobre a diversidade enquanto mais-valia. Para um futuro com mais equidade, sugere-se o desenvolvimento de empatia para redução de preconceitos sociais.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Evitamento da Incerteza. Resiliência. Famílias. Empatia.

INTRODUCTION

Culture has a decisive impact on perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. A possible synthesis of this concept is that "culture consists of the collective programming that makes members of one society different from members of another" (MATUSITZ; MUSAMBIRA, 2013), being essential to consider interculturality in lifelong learning in order to develop more well-being, with a reduction of social prejudices.

With this theme in view, Hofstede (2011) and his collaborators created studies that allowed one to characterize and measure different dimensions that make up culture. The studies engendered a set of five dimensions which are present in each culture, although with different expressions, namely: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance (UA), Individualism, Masculinity and Long-Term Orientation (MATUSITZ; MUSAMBIRA, 2013; HOFSTED, 2011).

Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) is one of the cultural dimensions present in several cultures which should be considered in the domains under study in cross-cultural psychology. UA will be the focus of this work as it is essential to the deconstruction of prejudices. UA has been widely described in literature for the organisational context, however, it is essential to reflect on its impact in other contexts, such as the family, which is a social group of distinct importance in the creation of socialisation as early as childhood and which may shape behaviours and attitudes throughout life (GIDDENS, 2014).

This work aims to promote a reflection on the close relationship between the dimension of uncertainty avoidance and family structures, highlighting how they can be promoters of resilience and well-being since they increase informal education and are essential for integral human development.

UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE

For Hofstede (2011), *Uncertainty Avoidance* can be defined as:

> [...] it deals with a society's tolerance for ambiguity; It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations (...). Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict behavioral codes, laws and rules, disapproval of deviant opinions, and a belief in absolute Truth (HOFSTEDE, 2011, p. 10).

According to the author, UA cannot be confused with *risk avoidance*. The latter has to be analysed as a different variable. The GLOBE Project has in turn been equally

interested in the contextualisation of culture as a transforming element, considering UA as: "[...] the extent to which the members of collectives seek orderliness, consistency, structure, formalised procedures and laws to cover situations in their daily lives" (SULLY; LUQUE; JAVIDAN, 2004 apud VENAIK; BREWER, 2010, p. 1297).

This cultural dimension of societies is classically related to the economic prosperity of countries and their openness to establish businesses and companies, as uncertainty is a central variable when making certain decisions related to investment in a given country: "UA is expected to affect international cooperation because of the tendency for high-UA societies to avoid the ambiguity and uncertainty that exist more in international business than in domestic transactions" (HOFSTEDE, 2001; SHENKAR, 2001 apud VERNAIK; BREWER, 2010, p. 1296).

Some studies report that there is a positive relationship between a country's economic prosperity and UA values, as a metric for understanding behavioural patterns and profiles. According to literature, this means that the higher the UA in a given country, the lower its capacity to produce wealth. Hence, UA levels in a given country can be good indicators of its openness to international markets and demands, having consequences for the settlement of firms and markets: "[...] UA is an important dimension of national culture that can explain the extent to which firms conduct international business and therefore, at a macro level, the degree to which countries are globalized" (VENAIK; BREWER, 2010, p. 1301).

Hofstede (2011) considers that societies with low levels of UA are characterized, among several aspects, by having: permanent uncertainty about life in general, accepting what daily life brings to them; low levels of stress and anxiety; good health indicators, whether in an objective or subjective perspective; greater tolerance towards each other's ideas (they see difference as something curious); greater comfort regarding ambiguity and chaos; in political terms, citizens feel competent towards authority. On the other hand, societies with high levels of UA differ from the previous ones in that: they perceive life as a constant threat that has to be fight against; they have high levels of stress and anxiety; low levels of health, whether in an objective or subjective perspective; intolerance towards different ideas (what is different from the norm constitutes a threat - minority issues, racism or even marked gender inequality stand out); they constantly need clarity and structure before taking decisions; politically, citizens feel and are seen as incompetent towards authority. Although doubts have been raised about the sociocultural bias of the results obtained, the most common

criticism concerns the fact that the conclusions refer to a very specific period : the 1960s and 1970s.

As for many Western societies, it is important to bear in mind that this model was initially developed in 1974, a moment that marks the transition from a dictatorial political regime to a democratic system (e.g. in Portugal). It is, thus, important to consider the temporal dimension as an element in the historical-sociological and macro-structural analysis (BRONFENBRENNER, 2005; GIDDENS, 2013). Introducing time to context is a differentiating element that attributes holistic and concrete meanings to social analysis as it creates a context that connects the individual to the collective narrative (BURKITT, 2021).

From the various contexts to the Family

The uncertainty avoidance dimension was initially more related to economic/organisational decision structures. However, its presence is not only found in this isolated context, since these patterns are experienced in group dynamics and have an influence on individual behaviour and on how the individual emotional management is performed in interaction with the perception of self and others (HOFSTEDE, 2001; TRINDADE, 2015). Therefore, it is transversal to several dimensions which create forms of *coping* according to the perception and management of avoidance in the face of uncertainty.

We could organise the forms of *coping* in the face of uncertainty avoidance into three major categories (HOFSTEDE, 2001; TRINDADE, 2015), namely: (a) laws, the place where people find more comfort for their general rules and by which they are governed in their interaction; (b) technology, which allows the management of uncertainty of human production, making everything more predictable and faster; (c) religion, which agglomerates all the rest, i.e., all issues that are unknown or beyond the person's control.

This model also indicates the need to think about three areas which are classically considered in the study of uncertainty avoidance: (d) job stability; (e) rule orientation; and (f) stress. These three areas are the orientation matrix of integration versus disintegration, little versus much-perceived well-being and are measured according to the levels of the index of this same author, at world level. This literature can thus be used as a way to transpose behaviours, expectations, and attitudes to the societal dimension, focusing on family life, since the family is an intersectional group and

mediates several dimensions of the *self*, to the micro or even the macrosystem (BRONFENBRENNER, 2005; SARRACENO; NALDINI, 2003).

In his work, Trindade (2015) presents a survey of the main topics from the perspective of the family group, which allows to organise characteristics associated with societies with low and high uncertainty avoidance (KASHIMA & KASHIMA, 1998). In societies with low uncertainty avoidance, it is common to observe the following: parental figures behave in a less emotional way; greater satisfaction with family life; perception of relative truth; fewer rules and less willingness to change them; weaker development of superegos; greater exposure of children to the unknown; the world is learned as a benevolent context; social interaction with less formal structure; less marked gender roles. In turn, in societies with high uncertainty avoidance, it was found that: parental figures react in a more emotional way; low satisfaction with family life; perception of truth as a unique construct; more rigid rules with less possibility to change them; greater and stronger development of superegos; greater protection of children from the unknown; perception of the world as a hostile place; social interaction with more formal communication structures; more traditional, unequal, and strengthened gender roles.

For all the above reasons, it is crucial to take into account the family as an influencing and influenced context in society, which integrates the adjustment and intergenerational education of its various members (COIMBRA; RIBEIRO; FONTAINE, 2013).

Family: systemic possibilities for resilience

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) developmental model, in which the ecological environment is conceived as a series of concentric structures containing, inside it, the developing subject and in which the same is influenced, directly and indirectly, by the different levels of the surrounding environment, in a symbiotic and bidirectional relationship (between the human being and the changing properties of the environments in which he/she moves, and of the wider contexts in which these environments are inserted), ends up connecting with the influence of intergenerational family relationships. Above all, when the model becomes bioecological (BRONFENBRENNER, 2005) and involves particular forms of interaction between organism and context, formulating themselves as proximal processes, where their

operationalisation in a time is considered, as primary mechanisms promoting human development and, finally, as variables from person to person (BARROS, 2021).

Thus, and considering the family group in a multisystemic and intersectional context, we should bear in mind that it is a privileged context for children's first socialization (GIDDENS; SUTTON, 2017), where the parental figures, as well as the other family figures, can mould behaviours, attitudes, standards and values that will integrate the way the child will gradually perceive, together with formal education and other groups, the social, political, economic and cultural relativization of the world (BARROS, 2021).

Some reference literature notes that early influence, with particular focus on the attachment relationships that children develop with their parents (e.g. YOUNG et al., 2006), highlights the creation of skills for vocational development from childhood to adolescence, provided that parents guarantee to their children a secure base of affection and tenderness, so that they can explore the world with confidence in order to make vocational investments.

Understanding the universality of the educating effect, transferable to the creation of values of more equality and human dignity, the reduction of prejudices related to everything that is different from the context experienced by the child and the family may arise here. In the same way that learning that leads to individual and group resilience is introduced, empathy must also be developed as a way to listen to the "Other".

FAMILY IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF RESILIENCE

Resilience as a concept was first applied to psychology in the 1950s. In 1969, it acquired a more scientific status with a characteristic defined as ego-resilience which is comprised of two aspects: *i) to withstand* pathogenic pressures; *ii) to* recover quickly from a collapse, with a functioning equivalent to the previous one, or even higher (ANTHONY, 1987).

The study and application of this area have been expanding its scope over the decades, initially more connected with the study of mental illnesses and, more currently, in the various psychosocial applications, as we have moved from a concept of individual invulnerability, to a dynamic process that is based on an adaptation with the interaction between internal and external resources that act synchronously to modify the effects of

adversity at various stages of the life cycle (COIMBRA, 2008; FERGUS; ZIMMERMAN, 2005; WALSH, 2020).

Thus, while there is a diverse spectrum of theoretical considerations on this topic, one definition that can be applied more intersectionally, citing Coimbra (2008), is that:

> [...] psychological resilience can be defined as the relationship between the stress or pressure suffered in the face of situations of adversity and people's adaptation or adjustment response (maintenance of original shape or deformation). Some people seem to easily 'turn things around' when facing adverse situations, while others get stuck in the ruts infringed by negative events (COIMBRA, 2008, p. 90-91).

In this reflection, it is important to consider whether resilience is: i) contextual/conjunctural. That is, a dichotomous characteristic of people with particularly challenging life contexts and with extreme adversities, being rarer profiles and enhanced by external systems (i.e. disasters, social and political instability; extreme poverty; pandemics). Or if, on the other hand, it is ii) structural/ psychological: a continuous characteristic, more common than the previous one and which belongs to the development of the individual, as well as to his or her adaptation at any stage from the first socialization in childhood to old age (ANAUT, 2003; BONANNO, 2004; COIMBRA, 2008; BARROS, 2021). Both belong to the psychosocial domain, enhancing social and cross-cultural psychology as an integrative discipline applied to different situations/individuals.

The discussion also assumes resilience as a trait and a process (DANNEFER, 1984). In other words, the "trait" emphasises the internal individual resources and characteristics, such as a sense of humour, altruism, sociability and maturity, among other social skills. In turn, the "process" emphasises how the context can function either as risk or as protection, linking the risk factors and mechanisms to the protective ones (DANNEFER, 1984; MASTEN, 2001), for a better adaptation to stress.

The various sources of stress that affect individual and family life are systemic and consider various structures near or far that can change and create crises - whether in the self, family group, or social context (BRONFENBRENNER, 2005; WALSH, 2020; WALSH; MCGOLDRICK, 2013).

Conceiving resilience as an internal and external interaction (MASTEN; WRIGHT, 2010), the mechanisms that longitudinal studies on resilience suggest are highlighted, organized in three "tiers" of characteristics and of high importance to development since childhood, being:

i) Personal: including characteristics such as intelligence and aptitudes; self-efficacy and self-esteem; hope; sociability, extroversion and other social skills;

ii) Family: highlighting the importance of a close relationship with a parental figure; group structure and support; expectations of family dynamics and processes; links with extended family;

iii) Extrafamilial social connections: where the connection to other individuals and organisations (e.g. school, church, communities) is indicated, which promotes perception and opportunities to develop internal competencies, sense of coherence and connection of the micro to the macro system, as well as more realistic/integrated planning of the formative/ professional future.

Family values and the belief system in the family unit may help to reduce the impact of stress factors throughout life. For this reason, resilience can be experienced with interdependence of its members and generational transmission in the family, reducing uncertainty about the future.

For being a mix between internal and external resources, resilience has a great impact for contextual or structural/ psychological reasons, including proximal and distal systems. Families can also transmit resilience between generations, as well as in the various subsystems that compose it (ATALLAH, 2017), as *coping* to its well-being.

More recent studies have sought to study resilience in Holocaust survivors and across family generations (BRAGA; MELLO; FIKS, 2012), highlighting the importance of the transmission of resilience as a family repertoire across generations, in families that are in war, refugee or migratory contexts (DENOV; FENNIG; RABIAU; SHEVELL, 2019, p. 26). According to these authors: "Intergenerational resilience, much like a family heirloom, builds on collective memory fostered within the family system, utilizing familial insights from the past to navigate the future".

The family assumes a cohesive component for adaptation and survival and/or generational transmission of skills and values that can facilitate integration, highlighting that in this context the family cannot be attached to the most common structural-spatial configurations, but rather those that span diverse countries, cultures and experiences (DENOV; FENNIG; RABIAU; SHEVELL, 2019).

Resilience can thus be considered as an own "product" that induces family protection to establish well-being in the various transitions of both the family and the changing society that aggregates increasingly global cultures and interactions (WALSH, 2020; BARROS, 2021), in which xenophobia, racism(s) or any prejudice that hinders

healthy development and with less perceived UA in the daily lives of these people can be visible.

And the context? Biculturality: the case of migration

As a preliminary point, the human capacity for resilience has evolved over many generations through the intervention and interaction of cultures, families and individuals. Individual resilience is deeply embedded in the legacies of cultural evolution passed on in the form of ideas and practices that influence individuals' experiences in various ways, in parenting, conjugality, language, education and community expectations.

Some literature has highlighted the importance of recognising that the way resilience is understood and expressed varies significantly between socio-cultural contexts. It can only be defined in context (PICKREN, 2014). As such, it is not possible to equate resilience with a set of pre-existing attributes because it is often informed by context and culture-specific goals and processes that endow it with specific meaning. This view is not unrelated to the premises of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979, 2005), previously addressed in this paper, which conceives of people embedded in ecologies from micro to macro systems. Or even, the systemic considerations of the family (DIAS, 2011).

Indeed, some authors have highlighted the importance of culture in understanding resilience (MASTEN, 2010; UNGAR, 2008). In his work, Ungar (2008) examined resilience across cultures, pointing out that even when we consider resilience as the human adaptive process, it is important not to lose the notion that adaptation is always about a process that has a time, a place and a context. The socio-cultural context or ecology in which individuals are embedded is vital. This same author defines resilience as the ability of individuals to navigate autonomously towards acquiring and possessing healthy sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being and as a condition in which families, community and culture provide these healthy resources and experiences in a culturally meaningful way (COIMBRA, 2008).

Convergent with this rationale, research and theorising on resilience has not focused solely on the individual level. Schools, social networks and peers, have been suggested as factors that facilitate individual resilience. However, in recent decades, researchers outside of psychology have enriched the understanding about the concept. Such research is equally vital in a world of people moving in different cultural contexts.

In recent years, intercultural and global societies are becoming more frequent. Often people with bicultural backgrounds (e.g. migrants) have a different understanding of social relations and obligations, bringing with them significantly different approaches to health, education, and neighbourhood relations from destination/host countries.

These differences in migrants' practices and beliefs have been addressed by social sciences as problematic and creating fragilities. What is also missing is an approach that focuses on the cultural resources that migrants carry with them that enable them to cope with the world, help them adapt to a new society, and that also enrich the country of destination. All these factors have important implications for understanding resilience in migrants (BEISER, 2005). And here again it may be more useful to consider the family as a unit for studying resilience rather than the individual in isolation.

For families, the migration experience is an extremely challenging transition. Some of the most frequent migration-related stressors for families involve loss of close relationships, uncertainty about the decision to migrate, changes in financial status, loss of lifestyle, changing cultural norms, and employment, among other potential stressors. Despite being stressors for migrant families, they also embody the potential to choose appropriate *coping* behaviours that allow keeping the family in balance, making the world more predictable and enabling crisis management (ANTONOVSKY; SOURANI, 1988).

In other words, the forms of family resilience vary depending on the socio-cultural-historical contexts in which the family exists (HAWLEY, 2000). And it is not a static construct based on a set of qualities that some families have and others do not. As Hawley (2000) suggests, it is a path that families often travel when dealing with challenges, and it is important to look at resilience as a process and a potential resource that a family group has available over time (HAWLEY, 2000).

Family values and belief systems play a very important role in mitigating the effect of transitions and changing circumstances in the family unit (SILBERBERG, 2001). A major challenge for migrant families to develop constructive practices are the cultural differences they are confronted with in the destination society. Culture does not have to be static or a fixed entity, it can be dynamic, fluid and emergent. Given this dynamic conceptualisation that the role of culture is flexible and fluid, migrants' sense of cultural identity can be a source of resilience and ability to negotiate the adaptation and integration process (PICKREN, 2014), reducing their perceived UA.

Maintaining cultural identity is a strategy widely used by migrants that can function as a form of resilience (SCHWARTZ; MONTGOMERY; BRIONES, 2006).

However, the impact of migration on identity is complex and not reduced to simple or linear operations and may even call into question and threaten their identity.

Some literature addresses the issue of bicultural identity in migrants and especially the children of migrants (HONG; MORRIS; CHIU; BENET-MARTINEZ 2000). In particular, it has been found that the *cultural code-switching* necessary for this type of identity has an overall positive effect. However, their work does not address bicultural identity formation. With increased migration, several researchers have begun to explore the issue of multiple group identities. Roccas and Brewer (2002) proposed complex social identity theory to represent how these group identities may overlap and the strategies individuals use to vary/oscillate between them.

In a literature review on collective identity, Ashmore and colleagues (2004) articulated a multidimensional approach that synthesises an extensive literature on identity concepts from traditional social psychology, such as self-categorisation, evaluation, interdependence, '*social* embeddedness',* and suggested viable evaluation strategies, including narratives, to apprehend the richness of collective identities and collective identity development.

Explicit studies focusing on resilience in the context of culture, or intercultural studies, remain quite limited. But there are signs of a new wave of resilience research that is expanding and is informed by culture as an aggregating and fluid element, indispensable to understanding socialization in children and adults.

The specific case of transnational families

The growing number of individuals emigrating around the world, coupled with the increasing restrictive emigration policies, especially in the global north, makes family migration a difficult undertaking. As a result, the number of transnational families where different family members live in different countries and nations has become a significant phenomenon. Not only children and parents are separated due to emigration, but also spouses and elderly parents become distant from relatives.

Studies which emerged in the 2000s served to draw attention to the phenomenon of transnational families (BRYCESON; VUORELA, 2002). These studies followed the more general and widespread change at the end of the 20th century in migration studies, which adopted a transnational perspective. This perspective conceives and attempts to understand migratory realities as composed of multifaceted relationships, encompassing social, cultural, economic and political domains, that link migrants with

their societies of origin (LEVITT, 2001; SCHILLER; BASCH; BLANC-SZANTON, 1992). Specifically, studies on transnational families focus on how emigrants and those who stayed in the country of origin experience and organize their lives.

Recently, studies using questionnaires and large-scale surveys have emerged, specially designed to collect information on the lives of transnational families, primarily focused on parents who emigrate and children who remain in the country of origin, in the care of usually another member of the extended or nuclear family. These studies have analysed the effects of migration on different family members: those who emigrate and those who stay at origin. The results have been diverse and sometimes provide nuances to small-scale studies, indicating that it is not transnational family life *per se* that leads to less emotional wellbeing, but also the characteristics of the emigrating parents, such as their income or legal status in the destination country (DITO; MAZZUCATO; SCHANS, 2017), the availability of family networks (DONATO; DUNCAN, 2011), the shape of the transnational family, the type of parental absence and the school and family environment of the children who are left behind (MAZZUCATO et al., 2015). There are notable differences in the results obtained by these large-scale analyses.

Some of the differences found in the results between studies may have to do with the specificities of the study contexts, but they point to the development based on the family group with the integration of multiple cultural experiences (e. g. PARREÑAS, 2005) which allow the integration of diversity as an asset.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Since the family is an agent of primary socialisation, influencing from childhood onwards the system of beliefs and attitudes regarding the perception of self and others, it is important to highlight the synchronous relationship between resilience and an intercultural approach for the creation of inclusive identity(ies).

The interaction between family, school and different social contexts is increasingly considered as a way of developing social and adjustment competencies in the face of the challenges that arise throughout the life cycle.

The interaction of contexts, in which Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model is framed, is an excellent reference point to understand the impact of the various systems in which the different family elements (children, but also parental figures) draw their perception of a global and constantly changing world. The change, perceived in

different ways and with different impacts where more direct issues to the family intervene - such as the possibility of guaranteeing the conditions for education, housing and health - become part of a spiral directly connected to the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance.

It seems relevant to us to highlight that the macrosystemic influence, even in a fluid culture and considering the power of the individual to influence and be influenced by his/her context (BROFEENBRENNER, 2005), impacts the adaptation to stress and the perception of stability, as well as the projection of well-being for the future. Furthermore, we also emphasise the impact that uncertainty avoidance may have on generational learning in a given culture and that it universally affects the informal or formal education of children.

The perception of uncertainty leads to greater closure regarding differences, consequently creating tension between different cultures, nationalities, an increase in racist and/or xenophobic attitudes. Not forgetting the gender equality gap that almost always happens in societies less open to equality and horizontality of powers, perpetuating inequalities. Here, the family can be a highly differentiating agent in resilience and creating inclusive education for the ascending generations.

This can materialise in education and socialisation wrapped in empathy. Empathy, the core of psychosocial and pro-social understanding and interaction, can be defined as the need to 'feel with others', develop active listening and the ability to put ourselves in the place of the sender of information (BARROS, 2022).

Gaspar (2021), refers that empathy allows for an active understanding of the other, enabling the decoding of emotions, motivations and intentions. Although in a differentiated way throughout life - the youngest children reveal empathic concern from 2-3 years of age - but only later are they able to understand the concrete needs of the other.

In any case, it is possible to develop a set of emotional skills and adequate social understanding in non-formal education since adults (i.e. parents) have developed their empathic capacities, both emotional and cognitive (GASPAR, 2021).

By assuming an educative role and a 'regulating' attitude towards empathy and the assumption of differences as a non-disruptive factor for development (CASSELS; CHUNG; CHAN, 2010), parents can begin to design paths for equity in their children.

This is important for citizens who grow up in contexts with high and low uncertainty avoidance, as it allows for common pathways to emerge in which an integrative attitude towards different social perspectives is developed.

The integration of intercultural values, which is reported to us by transnational families, can be an example of taking an (inter)cultural perspective where a set of emotional management skills are developed in a larger spectrum of integration. Additionally, we cannot forget the transculturality that these households bring to their most diverse contexts.

We believe that this reflection, which invites us to get to know resilience (with empathy), families (with the example of transnationals) can indicate steps towards the reduction of inequalities in which we all participate as social and family agents for a fairer society.

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NOTAS
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Enfrentar a Incerteza. O Papel da Família no Desenvolvimento de Identidade(s)

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