Identity formation – Processes of achieving one’s identity

Erikson – *Central Task of Adolescence*

- People sometimes question their identity well into adulthood, however, as noted in an Erikson quote on p. 175 of the Arnett textbook. A scene from *Everybody Loves Raymond*, in which Raymond’s brother Robert questions whether he wants to remain a police officer after many years on the job, illustrates lifelong re-evaluation of one’s identity (*link*: begins around the 18:00 part).

Why does one need a firm identity? Benefits of one

Ethnic identity
Identity-Formation Framework of James Marcia, “one of Erikson’s most influential interpreters” (Arnett, p. 178)

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<th>Commitment to Identity</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moratorium <em>(Exploring, But No Commitment Yet)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Diffusion</td>
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*A similar term is “Early Closure.”*

Regarding Diffusion, see Jeffrey Arnett’s response in this video to the question of how do we know when an adolescent’s struggles signify something is wrong. Also, a humorous example of Diffusion.
How Commonly Do Youth Achieve Identity?


“In general, research has supported Erikson’s model, with one important exception: the timetable. It now appears that, at least in contemporary society, the bulk of identity ‘work’ occurs late in adolescence, and perhaps not even until young adulthood” (p. 91).

James Côté (2006)

"Erikson... argued that most cultures historically provide their young people with some sort of *structured delay from adult responsibilities*, during which novitiates can take time to develop their adult identities within guiding social structures...

These identity *moratoria* usually grant adolescents and emerging adults the license to *experiment* with various roles... without them being expected to accept or carry permanent responsibilities and commitments. This experimentation can take various forms of exploration, including travel..., military service (or programs such as the Peace Corps), schooling, or even just 'dropping out' for a while..." (Cote, p. 87).

(Continues on next slide)
"..surely exploration-based identity formation must be commonplace among those of emerging adult age -- especially college students -- and most students must graduate with a strong sense of themselves and where they are going in the world, especially occupationally. In fact, there is little evidence for this...

Most people studied thus far apparently do little active, conscious deliberation on a variety of alternative identities -- instead taking a passive approach to just letting things happen for them, as is characteristic of diffusion (an estimated 25% of college students and 10%-20% of the adult population), or avoiding active deliberation and quietly taking the lead from their parents with little forethought, as is characteristic of foreclosure (estimated at 30%-40% of the adult population...)

(Côté, pp. 96-97).

Côté cites estimates that only 10%-30% of young people (in Western societies) experience a moratorium, and 20%-30% reach identity achievement.


Like many things in life, identity formation is not always linear. Current statuses are reconsidered, can go back to earlier stages.

Progressive/regressive shifts (see Figure 1)

Luyckx Dual-Cycle Model
- Exploration in breadth (multiple alternatives, before choosing)
- Exploration in depth (after choosing, re-evaluating one’s identity in depth)
Benefits of an Achieved Identity

The Functions of Identity Scale
(Serafini, Maitland, & Adams, 2006; following quote is from test manual)

The Functions of Identity Scale measures what having a well synthesized or well constructed sense of self provides a person. The focus is on the outer workings of identity – what identity functions to do rather than how identity is constructed. The functions of identity are theoretically aligned with Erikson’s notion of an “optimal identity” (Erikson, 1968, p. 165) [.] The functions of identity theoretical framework seeks to describe how identity serves to provide individuals with a sense of structure with which to understand self-relevant information; a sense of harmony between chosen values, beliefs and commitments; a future orientation where goals may be pursued in the context of achieving a sense of a possible self and fostering a congruency between one’s view of oneself in the present and in the future; a goal-orientation where individuals actively pursue goals that are congruent with an established sense of self or personal identity; and a sense of personal control, free will or agency that enables active self-regulation in the process of setting and achieving goals, moving toward future plans, and processing experiences in ways that are self-relevant.

Fill out “Functions of Identity Scale” (Online collection of identity measures)

Vic Strecher TED Talk (Added March 2018)

Sense of purpose or self-affirmation improves health (9:35-12:45)
IDENTITY PROJECTS (DeLuca, Clampet-Lundquist, & Edin, 2016)

- Interviews in Baltimore, Maryland with 150 adolescents and emerging adults (15-24) from “deeply disadvantaged origins” (low parental education, nearly half of participants had parents who had been incarcerated or had alcohol/drug problems)

- What characteristics seemed to separate those who stayed “on track” (in school or working) and those “in the street”?

- “we explored a variety of possibilities... such as childhood trauma..., direct exposure to violence, the presence of adult role models, and whether a parent or primary caregiver was employed, struggled with a substance abuse problem, or was in jail”

- “Each of these factors turned out to be important... None... was as powerful, however, as what we call an identity project.” (see Table 3.1, p. 67)

- “An identity project is a source of meaning that provides a strong sense of self and is linked to concrete activities to which youth commit themselves.”

- Examples include arts/music, poetry, making rap beats and putting them on the Internet, tending to flock of birds, and working with learning-disabled children

- Identity projects appear to be most effective when pursued in conjunction with some kind of community organization, rather than just personally in isolation
Coates became very passionate about **djembe drumming**, which might be considered his identity project:

*All year, I’d been working toward better drumming, showing up early for classes, teaching young children, and tinkering with the threading and tightness of my own djembe* (p. 210).

*My talent was second tier and I knew I would always be a workman, a support player for someone else’s glorious show. But I was so in love, and so of the spirit, that I just did not care* (p. 216).
Ethnic Identity

Bicultural Identity (overview in textbook)

  - List of types of people who may develop bicultural identity (p. 122: “These bicultural individuals may be…”)
  - Four categories (integration/bicultural, assimilation, separation, marginalization) defined in bottom paragraph of p. 123.
  - Main findings (p. 131: Results show a “strong association between biculturalism and positive adjustment”)

- Example of a bicultural identity

Historical Note: Clark & Clark (1947) Doll Studies

- Original article (conducted entirely on African-American children, p. 170; main results in Tables 5 and 8)
- Small-scale repeat of study in 2010 (see text beginning at “In the new study…”)

General Resources on Identity

International Society for Research on Identity
http://identityisri.org/

Impact of College: “As a Freshman, You Can’t Avoid Reinvention”

Texas Tech commencement speech by Scott Pelley of CBS News (and a former TTU student) on following one’s heart and finding one’s true calling (especially from 12:00-15:00, during which he talks about a cab driver who pursued his dream to become a television camera operator covering wars)