

Processes of personal identity formation and evaluation

Koen Luyckx

Seth J. Schwartz

Luc Goossens

Wim Beyers

Lies Missotten

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The present chapter focuses on a process-oriented approach to personal identity development (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006), strongly grounded in Marcia's (1966) seminal identity status paradigm and extensions of this paradigm. First, we outline the identity status paradigm and some neo-Eriksonian models that have been introduced as extensions of this paradigm (Lichtwarck-Aschoff, van Geert, Bosma, & Kunnen, 2008; Schwartz, 2001). We pay particular attention to integrative theoretical viewpoints that bring together various neo-Eriksonian perspectives on identity and that served as important sources of inspiration for the model we developed. Second, we introduce an integrative model of identity development, focusing on the processes involved in both the formation and the evaluation of identity commitments. The developmental trajectories of the constituting identity dimensions are sketched throughout the emerging adult years, both for the total sample and for distinct classes of individuals. Important antecedents, correlates, and consequences of the identity dimensions are outlined. Third, in an attempt to explain the paradoxical association of identity exploration with both positive and maladaptive psychosocial outcomes, we distinguish between reflective and ruminative components of exploration. Based on this new extended identity model, we empirically derive identity statuses, further validating Marcia's status paradigm. We describe ways in which these identity dimensions and statuses are related to psychosocial and health outcomes in normative (both high school and college students and employees) and clinical populations (such as individuals with a chronic illness). Finally, some suggestions for interventions are provided with a focus on promotion of adaptive exploratory strategies and formation of self-endorsed commitments (Schwartz, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2005).

The Identity Status Paradigm and its Extensions

Erikson and Marcia as Founding Fathers

The identity development model proposed in this chapter is grounded in Erikson's (1950, 1968) and Marcia's (1966) work (Kroger & Marcia, this volume). Erikson's seminal theory emphasizes identity development as the most prominent developmental task of adolescence, and

identity revision as an important developmental task during adulthood (cf. Kroger, 2007). Erikson conceptualized identity as a multidimensional construct tapping into cognitive, moral, cultural, and social aspects and encompassing different levels of analysis (i.e., ego, personal, and social dimensions). For Erikson, identity mainly represents a subjective feeling of sameness and continuity across time and across contexts, and it is best represented by a single bipolar dimension, ranging from identity synthesis to identity confusion. *Identity synthesis* refers to a reworking of childhood identifications into a larger and self-determined set of ideals, values, and goals, whereas *identity confusion* represents an inability to develop a workable set of goals and commitments on which to base an adult identity (Schwartz, 2001). Importantly, Erikson stressed that identity is never “final” and continues to develop throughout the lifespan. Due to both normative developmental changes and transactions with the environment, one’s identity is subject to change and transformation. This core assumption of identity development as an ongoing psychosocial task has guided the identity model that was developed by Luyckx, Goossens, and Soenens (2006).

Although a number of writers attempted to operationalize Erikson’s theoretical and clinical writings for empirical research, the identity status paradigm (Kroger & Marcia, this volume; Marcia, 1966, 1980) was the first neo-Eriksonian identity model to generate a significant research literature. Indeed, the vast majority of personal identity research is grounded in the identity status model – or in other models that expand in significant ways on the concept of identity status (Schwartz, 2001). As explained by Kroger and Marcia (this volume), Marcia’s primary objective was to identify key identity processes described by Erikson and to operationalize them for empirical research. By targeting the dimensions of exploration (consideration of multiple identity alternatives) and commitment (making a choice to adhere to one or more of the alternatives considered) – and how they interact to determine the presence of identity statuses – Marcia attempted to identify psychological or behavioral markers of an underlying identity structure.

Each identity status represents a combination of levels (present or absent) of exploration and commitment. Achievement and foreclosure are both characterized by the presence of identity

commitments but differ in the degree to which the person has explored prior to enacting the commitment. Achievement is characterized by commitments following a period of exploration, whereas foreclosure is characterized by commitments enacted without much prior exploration. Moratorium and diffusion, on the other hand, are both characterized by the relative absence of commitment but differ in terms of whether the person is engaging in systematic identity exploration. Individuals in moratorium are currently exploring potential life choices, whereas diffused individuals have engaged in little or no systematic identity exploration. Abundant research, mostly cross-sectional, has focused on the presumed antecedents, correlates, and outcomes of these statuses (Kroger & Marcia, this volume; Marcia, 1993).

Influential Neo-Eriksonian Extensions

Since the mid-1980s, a number of authors have proposed models that expand on the identity statuses (Schwartz, 2001). Some of these perspectives are reviewed in this book (Berzonsky, this volume; Waterman, this volume). Schwartz (2001) and Lichtwarck-Aschoff et al. (2008) reviewed these different perspectives and organized them in classification schemes. In the next sections, rather than trying to classify, we shortly describe some of these different neo-Eriksonian perspectives and explain how they inspired us to develop an integrated process-oriented model. More specifically, three models will be shortly discussed, that is, Grotevant's (1987) process model, Kerpelman's (Kerpelman, Pittman, & Lamke, 1997) identity control model, and Bosma and Kunnen's (2001) transactional model.

First, Grotevant (1987) focused on exploration – which he defined as “problem-solving behavior aimed at eliciting information about oneself or one’s environment in order to make a decision about an important life choice” (p. 204) – as the process underlying identity development (see Berzonsky, this volume, for similar ideas). As such, he saw exploration at the heart of identity work in late adolescence and emerging adulthood. Identity exploration, as conceptualized by Grotevant, involves five interrelated factors that interact over time as the individual moves toward making commitments: (a) initial expectations and beliefs that guide and shape the exploration

process; (b) hypothesis-testing behaviors conducted by the individual; (c) the degree of energy and affective investment in existing commitments; (d) the degree to which competing alternatives are judged as attractive, or the presence of counterbalancing factors that discourage further exploration (such as a romantic relationship which may lead one to decline opportunities to explore careers in faraway places); and (e) interim evaluations of the progress made to judge whether further exploration is necessary.

Consistent with a constructivist perspective on identity (for a discussion on constructivist vs. discovery perspectives, see Soenens & Vansteenkiste, this volume; Waterman, this volume), Grotevant (1987) hypothesized that assimilation (i.e., incorporating new information into an existing identity structure) and accommodation (i.e., challenging and transforming the existing structure by new information) both occur during identity exploration. Commitments enacted as a result of the exploration process become integrated into a newly consolidated sense of identity, which may contribute to a feeling of personal continuity over time (Dunkel, 2005). The individual then is charged with determining how satisfying and self-concordant this new identity is and how well it fits with the contexts in which one operates. These goodness-of-fit evaluations then cycle back to influence orientation and motivation to engage in further identity work and to reconsider various alternatives (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008). If one's commitments are judged as unsatisfactory, one may resume the process of exploration. This may occur as a result of recurrent evaluations of one's current commitments, mandated by situational changes, individual growth, or other new information (Schwartz, 2001). In short, Grotevant alluded to the importance of both the *formation* and the continuous *evaluation* of identity commitments, and both these processes were proposed to influence each other in reciprocal fashion.

Second, identity control theory (Kerpelman et al., 1997) was proposed as an extension of Grotevant's (1987) model. This model focuses on day-to-day mechanisms and interactions between individuals' personal standards or goals and their functioning, on the one hand, and relational processes (e.g., partner feedback and acceptance), on the other hand, as a way of targeting the

microprocesses that drive exploration and identity development. Identity control theory views identity development as a series of recurrent feedback loops intended to minimize the discrepancy between one's self-perceptions and the feedback received from others. Interpersonal feedback is most strongly valued when it originates from significant others, such as parents, peers, or romantic partners (Kerpelman et al., 1997; Schwartz, 2001). When the self-perception and the interpersonal feedback are incongruent, either the specific self-perception or the social situation itself are changed to produce congruence between the self-perception and personal standard (assimilation), or – when the latter course of action fails – the person's identity undergoes more comprehensive changes (accommodation). This process is repeated until the identity standard or goal is validated or modified. Again in line with Grotevant's model, Kerpelman et al. indicate that forming an initial sense of identity is an important first step. However, much identity work centers on evaluating how well this sense of identity fits with (internalized) personal standards and goals. For instance, Kerpelman et al. conceptualized exploration partially as a way to obtain feedback – both intra- and inter-personally – on current identity configurations and to evaluate the choices one has made in comparison with the identity goals one upholds.

Finally, much like the models introduced by Grotevant and by Kerpelman and colleagues, Bosma and Kunnen (2001) argued that identity development can be described as a sequence of short-term re-occurring transactions between a person and her or his context. Continuous identity work leads to confirmation of, or changes in, one's existing identity commitments. A balance between assimilation and accommodation is necessary for the development of a mature, flexible, and coherent identity. By defining identity development as changes in the strength and quality of commitments, Bosma and Kunnen (2001) recast commitment as a process rather than as an outcome. That is, commitments are continuously evaluated, and maintained or changed as a result of this evaluation – rather than representing the endpoint of the identity development process.

To summarize, whereas the identity status model initially focused primarily on the formation of identity commitments (e.g., Marcia, 1966, 1980, 1993; Waterman, 1982), the distinction between

identity formation and evaluation was made explicit, among others, by Grotevant (1987). Subsequent theorizing suggested that formative and evaluative processes complement and influence each other, and should be included within a larger and more comprehensive model. However, no systematic attempts have been made to empirically integrate commitment formation and commitment evaluation into a single model of personal identity development. In other fields of identity, however, such efforts have been undertaken. For example, with respect to sexual identity development (Dillon & Worthington, this volume), Worthington, Navarro, Savoy, and Hampton (2008) developed an instrument to assess four identity dimensions (commitment, exploration, identity uncertainty, and synthesis or integration), enabling researchers to capture both development and revision of sexual identity.

A Process-Oriented Approach to Identity Formation and Evaluation

Introducing Four Interrelated Dimensions

Through the use of confirmatory factor analysis, Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, and Beyers (2006) were able to validate a four-dimensional model consisting of exploration in breadth, commitment making, exploration in depth, and identification with commitment. Underlying this model is an unpacking of commitment and exploration into two separate but interrelated dimensions apiece. By doing so, this model captures the dimensions by which adolescents select one of many possible identity alternatives. We refer to the dimensions involved in commitment formation as *exploration in breadth* and *commitment making* (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006). Exploration in breadth refers to gathering, both internally and externally, of information on various identity alternatives (sample items read: “I think actively about different directions I might take in my life” and “I think about different goals that I might pursue”). Commitment making refers to enacting strong choices in different identity domains, perhaps as a result of exploration in breadth (sample items read: “I have decided on the direction I am going to follow in my life” and “I have plans for what I am going to do in the future”).

Approaches to commitment evaluation have concentrated primarily on the appraisal and reformulation of identity commitments (e.g., Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Kerpelman et al., 1997; Meeus, 1996). These approaches highlight the dimensions by which adolescents continuously evaluate their identity commitments. We refer to these dimensions as *exploration in depth* and *identification with commitment* (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006). Exploration in depth refers to introspective mechanisms, gathering information, and talking with others about current commitments (i.e., commitments one has made already) in order to evaluate them (Meeus, 1996) (sample items read: “I think about whether my plans for the future really suit me” and “I try to find out what other people think about the specific direction I decided to take in my life”). Identification with commitment refers to the degree of security and certainty experienced with regard to one’s existing commitments and to how well these commitments fit with one’s own standards and wishes (Bosma, 1985) (sample items read: “My plans for the future match with my true interests and values” and “I am sure that my plans for the future are the right ones for me”). Both these terms were already used to some extent by authors such as Bosma (1985), Grotevant (1987), and Marcia (1993).

Identification with commitment bears some similarity to the idea of person-commitment fit advanced in Waterman’s (1992) eudaimonistic identity theory (Waterman, this volume) and in Deci and Ryan’s (2002) self-determination theory (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, this volume). Waterman defines *personal expressiveness* (an index of person-commitment fit) as engagement in self-defining activities and commitments that draw upon one’s fundamental purposes in life. Personal expressiveness thus refers to the degree to which a person’s sense of identity corresponds to her or his unique potentials (Waterman, 1990). Personal expressiveness also serves as an index of intrinsic motivation (Waterman et al., 2003), in that individuals experience a special fit or meshing with, and an unusually intense involvement in, their activities or commitments. When the alternatives considered and committed to are consistent with one’s potentials (cf. the notion of autonomy within

self-determination theory), commitment making might constitute a path to self-discovery (Schwartz, 2002; Schwartz, Mullis, Waterman, & Dunham, 2000).

To clarify the meaning of these four different dimensions, take, for example, an individual who enrolls in college. After he or she explored various possibilities for academic majors through, for instance, reading flyers or talking with others (exploration in breadth), he or she might choose one specific major (commitment making). The fact that he or she chooses a major does not imply that the identity process is finished. He or she will probably continue to gather information (exploration in depth) and turn his or her attention inwards to evaluate the choice being made. Gathering information about that specific choice can lead to a growing conviction that the chosen major is the right one (identification with that major will strengthen) or, conversely, that the chosen major is not the right one (identification with that major will weaken). If the person decides that this major is not the correct one, then exploration in breadth may resume and a broad-based search for different alternatives might start all over again. In sum, a critical characteristic of this developmental sequence is its reciprocal nature (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Grotevant, 1987; Kerpelman et al., 1997). Identity development has often been characterized as an alternation of exploration and re-evaluation (Arnett, 2004; Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992). Exploration in depth and identification with commitment interact in such a way that not only does exploration in depth influence identification with commitment, but identifications also influence the need for a prolonged exploration in depth of those commitments or, as outlined in the example, a renewed exploration in breath of alternatives.

Exploration in breadth and exploration in depth share some common ground in that they are both characterized, and probably instigated, by being information-oriented and having an open outlook on life (Berzonsky, this volume), which is evidenced by the substantial correlation (r s range from .47 to .66, $ps < .001$; mean $r = .55$) obtained between both dimensions in a series of Belgian studies using the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale¹ (DIDS; Luyckx, Schwartz,

¹ The first studies using this extended model (e.g., Luyckx et al., 2005, 2006) made use of two questionnaires (i.e., the Utrecht-Groningen Identity Development Scale and the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire). Partially due to the fact

Berzonsky, et al., 2008). However, they likely differ in their target and goal (i.e., choosing from different alternatives vs. evaluating current commitments) and their specific strategies involved (i.e., more externally-oriented broad-based vs. more internally-based; Berzonsky & Luyckx, 2008). Relatedly, longitudinal research has documented that these dimensions do not develop in tandem; increases (or decreases) in exploration in breadth were not necessarily accompanied by increases (or decreases) in exploration in depth, and vice versa (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006).

Both commitment making and identification with commitment also share a substantial amount of variance in Belgian studies using the DIDS (*rs* range from .62 to .69, *ps* < .001; mean *r* = .66) probably due to the fact that the enacting of strong identity choices generally generates feelings and perceptions of security and certainty. Further, changes in both these dimensions were substantially and positively related across time: increases (or decreases) in commitment making were positively related to increases (or decreases) in identification with commitment (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006). However, as demonstrated later on in the chapter, commitment making and identification with commitment not always need to go hand in hand. Further, the distinction between these dimensions shed new empirical light on the link between identity and psychosocial adjustment. Two studies (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006; Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, et al., 2008) revealed, when looking at unique associations, that identification with commitment was substantially related to various indicators of psychosocial adjustment, whereas commitment making was largely unrelated to these outcome measures. Recent studies in the US (e.g., Schwartz, Forthun, et al., 2010), however, emphasized the need to improve the measurement of both these dimensions given the fact that they were very highly correlated, somewhat questioning the distinctiveness of both dimensions as assessed in the English version of the DIDS.

We argue that the current model not only applies to certain chosen identities across the life-span (such as occupational identity) but also to ascribed identities (i.e., an identity or personal asset over which one has no personal control), such as one's race or ethnicity (Umaña-Taylor, this

that these questionnaires assessed different identity domains to some degree, the correlations among the four identity dimensions were substantially lower as compared to the correlations obtained with the DIDS.

volume) or having been adopted (Grotevant & Von Korff, this volume). In such cases, the model provides insights in how individuals assess and evaluate what these ascribed identities *mean* to them. For instance, being adopted or being male or female may carry different meanings for different individuals, and these meanings can be explored, committed to, and subsequently identified with or revisited. So, although these four identity dimensions are thought to characterize identity development in general, individual differences exist both in the extent to which individuals utilize these processes and in the extent to which these processes develop and influence each other across time (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006). For instance, for foreclosed adolescents – those who latch onto the values and choices provided by significant others without considering other alternatives (Marcia, 1966, 1980) – a thorough exploration in breadth prior to making commitments is largely absent. Further, when individuals experience the commitments they have enacted as personally expressive, they may feel less inclined to proceed to an in-depth affective or socio-cognitive evaluation of their commitments (i.e., exploration in depth). The congruence between the commitments made and the person's potentials and wishes may decrease the need for re-evaluation of the choices enacted, resulting in a high degree of identification with commitment without the need for extensive exploration in depth.

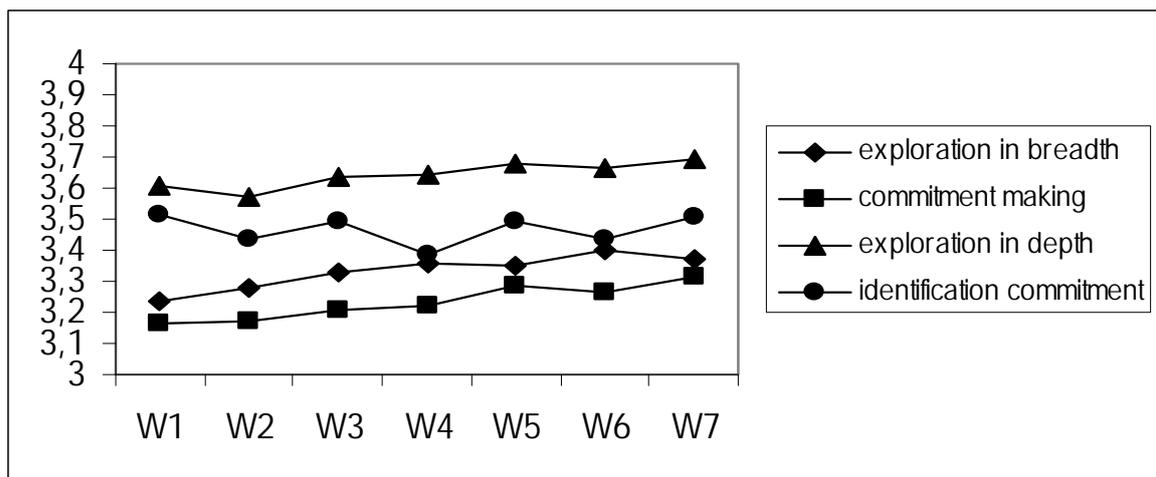
The current theorizing has recently inspired more neo-Eriksonian researchers to develop similar process-oriented models. For instance, Crocetti et al. (2008) have proposed a three-dimensional identity model, consisting of commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment (see Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, & Meeus, 2010, for a longitudinal investigation). Reconsideration of commitment bears some similarity to exploration in breadth because it encompasses sorting through different alternatives. The impetus for this search, however, comes from evaluating current commitments and finding that they are no longer sufficient or satisfying. As such, similar to our work, the three-dimensional model introduced by Crocetti et al. (2008) explicitly focuses on some of the mechanisms involved in constructing and revising one's identity (Klimstra, Luyckx, Hale, Meeus, van Lier, & Frijns, in press).

Assessing Identity Development across Time

Most of the work based on this four-dimensional model has been conducted with a longitudinal dataset in which these identity dimensions were assessed 7 times with semi-annual measurement waves in a sample of college students (i.e., the Leuven Trajectories of Identity Development Study or L-TIDES; Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2008). This design enabled us to examine how these dimensions develop and relate to one another across time. Figure 1 illustrates the mean developmental trends for the total sample across time. Changes in the dimensions of commitment formation and evaluation appeared to be limited and gradual, with no steep increases or decreases. Further, the initial levels of these identity dimensions (scores could range between 1 and 5) were already quite elevated when our participants entered university at Wave 1. These findings confirm that commitment formation and evaluation already take place during the high school years (Klimstra et al., 2010; Kroger & Marcia, this volume; Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijsers, Schwartz, & Branje, in press).

Figure 1.

Mean Observed Developmental Trends of Four Identity Dimensions in L-TIDES.



Latent growth curve analyses reported in Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Soenens, and Beyers (2008) indicated that, on average, commitment making and exploration in depth increased linearly

over time (Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999). Exploration in breadth showed a linear increase over time combined with a negative quadratic slope, signaling that the linear increase leveled off towards the end of the study. Apparently, the motivation to engage in a broad exploration of different alternatives might stabilize or even decrease as the strength of commitments continues to increase (Grotevant, 1987). Of course, a thorough exploration in breadth may occur again later on in adulthood – such as during the “midlife crisis”. Identification with commitment showed a linear decrease over time coupled with a positive quadratic slope. This means that the linear decrease leveled off during the course of the study and that the scores showed an upward trend towards the end. Interestingly, the observed trajectory of identification with commitment seemed to fluctuate from one measurement wave to the next. These fluctuations could very well reflect a continuous evaluative process, which has been hypothesized to represent a core mechanism in identity evaluation (Kerpelman et al., 1997). The fact that these fluctuations emerged in averaged group data possibly indicated that, given the fact that all participants were college students from the same faculty, important contextual factors (such as having exams twice a year) influenced their identity development to some extent.

Up till now, we described identity development at the group level so we focused on the developmental trajectories of the four identity dimensions, averaged across all individual trajectories. Only recently, Kunnen (2009) investigated identity formation at the individual level and assessed how 28 psychology students developed across a period of three years with respect to their educational commitments. Evidence was obtained for substantial inter-individual differences in developmental pathways. Importantly, several authors have stressed this heterogeneity or diversity in identity development in adolescence and (emerging) adulthood and, consequently, have distinguished – empirically, theoretically, or both – among different identity statuses, classes, or trajectories. As demonstrated in Table 1, these classes are remarkably consistent across studies, despite the fact that the dimensions used to assign individuals to these classes differ across studies.

The existence of these different classes (with some additional variants being identified) was again confirmed by Kunnen (2009 in her qualitative study).

Table 1

Typologies of Identity Formation in Adolescence and Adulthood

Author(s)	Class Labels			
Marcia (1966)	Achievement	Moratorium	Foreclosure	Diffusion
Josselson (1996)	Pathmakers	Searchers	Guardians	Drifters
Côté & Levine (2002)	Resolvers	Searchers	Guardians	Drifters/Refuser
Helson & Srivastava (2001)	Achievers	Seekers	Conservers	Depleted

Josselson (1996) extended Marcia's (1966) identity status approach into midlife through a qualitative longitudinal study of women's development, beginning at the end of college. Josselson assumed that Marcia's four identity statuses represented identity trajectories, or characterological ways of approaching identity issues throughout adulthood. Indeed, supporting this assumption, the identity status to which young women were assigned in college was found to predict the ways in which they dealt with the challenges throughout adulthood. In early adulthood, *pathmakers* were taking on new challenges, whereas *guardians* continued to feel firm in the commitments they had adopted from significant others early in their lives. *Searchers* continued to experience substantial ambivalence and self-doubt, and *drifters* were still unable to find meaning in their lives. By middle age, all groups had increased in awareness, albeit in different ways. By that time, pathmakers had integrated new aspects in their ever-evolving sense of self; guardians had learned to make their own decisions; and searchers had moved toward a clearer sense of self-definition. Only the drifters continued to stand out because their increased awareness had only allowed them to accept themselves and their histories, without finding their place in life.

Côté and Levine (2002) distinguished among 5 identity strategies theorized as being common in late-modern societies. *Resolvers* are actively engaged in the process of forming an identity, fully capitalizing on opportunities provided within society, and motivated by a desire to optimize their potentials. *Searchers* are often driven by unrealistically high standards, rendering them unable to

form a steady set of commitments. They seem to be locked in a perpetual state of identity exploration and are in despair about their inability to enact or sustain commitments. In contrast, *guardians* have internalized the values of their parents or of society, providing them with a set of strict guidelines to move into adulthood. However, the rather rigid nature of this process, insensitive to change, could prevent them from growing intellectually and emotionally. Finally, *refusers* and *drifters* evidence a lack of steady commitments to an adult lifestyle and community. These two subgroups are distinguished in terms of the resources they have at their disposal. Whereas refusers have few resources at their disposal, drifters are more resourceful, but they seem unable or uninterested in using the resources available.

Finally, Helson and Srivastava (2001) distinguished among four distinct classes of personality development in midlife women, based upon two underlying dimensions (environmental mastery and personal growth; Ryff, 1989). Environmental mastery was defined as the ability to achieve a good fit with one's environment and to have a sense of mastery in managing and relating to the environment. Personal growth was defined as the ability to see the self as growing and expanding in ways that reflect increasing self-knowledge and effectiveness. Individuals scoring high on both dimensions were labeled *achievers*, displaying a conscientious, outgoing orientation, superior effectiveness, and identity integration. Individuals scoring high on personal growth but low on environmental mastery were labeled *seekers*. They were open for new experiences and evidenced the greatest amounts of identity exploration. Individuals scoring high on environmental mastery but low on personal growth were labeled *conservers*, and these individuals were motivated to seek security and were described as readily accepting social norms and values. Finally, individuals scoring low on both dimensions were labeled *depleted*, lacking confidence, psychological resources, and identity integration.

Building on these previous models and through the use of longitudinal mixture modeling, Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Soenens, and Beyers (2008) empirically identified four developmental trajectory classes: pathmakers, searchers, guardians, and consolidators. No separate

class of diffusions or drifters could be empirically distinguished. It is possible that individuals matching the drifter profile may have dropped out of the longitudinal study after one or two assessment waves (the class solution was derived using only those individuals who participated in at least 3 of the 7 waves of data collection).

Pathmakers displayed high scores on all four identity dimensions, and these scores – except for identification with commitment – increased across time. These individuals were also characterized by moderate or high levels of well-being. Pathmakers appear to be active in forming, evaluating, and strengthening their commitments - characteristic of what Côté and colleagues (Côté & Levine, 2002; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005) have labeled as developmental individualization. Developmental individualization represents a conscious search for growth opportunities (see also Stephen et al.'s, 1992, description of the experiential orientation and Berzonsky's, this volume, description of the information-oriented style). The developmentally individualized person transacts with the environment in a purposeful way and takes advantage of social possibilities in an active manner to form, develop, and evaluate her or his identity on the way to self-realization (Côté, 2002; Schwartz, 2002; Waterman, this volume).

Searchers scored low on the commitment dimensions and high on the exploration dimensions. They were exploring various alternatives in breadth, but they were also evaluating tentative commitments. A substantial portion of searchers were characterized by fairly high and stable levels of distress (Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, et al., 2008; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, & Rodriguez, 2009). These individuals are likely characterized by default individualization – a passive and confused approach to transacting with the social environment (Côté & Schwartz, 2002; Schwartz, Côté, et al., 2005) – which may interfere with the development and evaluation of commitments (Stephen et al., 1992). However, many searchers reported moderate levels of well-being, and about 20% of individuals in this class were characterized by high levels of self-esteem and low levels of depressive symptoms. Apparently, intense identity searching can be associated with some distress, but it also may serve as the route to personal growth (Arnett, 2000; Helson &

Srivastava, 2001) and, hence, needs to be viewed in the light of personal development or self-discovery (Schwartz, 2002; Waterman, this volume). As we will note below, the extent to which exploration is associated with self-discovery or with distress likely depends partially on the quality and coherence of the exploration process itself (Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, et al., 2008).

Guardians displayed stable moderate scores on all four identity dimensions across time. Apparently, these individuals are rather closed to new identity options and do not thoroughly explore their current commitments. These individuals – to some degree – resemble “firm” or “closed” foreclosures (Archer & Waterman, 1990; Kroger, 1995) who tend to react defensively to information that threatens their identity. Schwartz, Côté, et al. (2005) found foreclosed individuals to have elevated scores on indices of default individualization, referring to a life course dictated by circumstance, with little agentic assertion on the part of the person (Côté, 2000).

Finally, the *consolidators* represented a relatively new identity trajectory class. Their main identity work appeared to be evaluating and consolidating their current identity commitments. They tended to score highly on commitment making, accompanied by a strong upward trend across time. Exploration in breadth, however, was relatively low. Exploration in depth and identification with commitment were initially high and remained so over time. Virtually all consolidators reported moderate to high levels of well-being across time. Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Soenens, et al. (2008) suggested that the consolidator class represents a developmental subtype of the guardian class. Archer and Waterman (1990) described a more adaptable subcategory of foreclosure – open foreclosure – that, to some extent, resembles the consolidator class. Open foreclosures are described as adolescents who have committed themselves to a set of alternatives without much prior exploration, but who are characterized by a flexible orientation (i.e., a high score on exploration in depth). However, although open foreclosures are willing to evaluate their current choices, they show virtually no interest in exploring other identity options.

These classes were developed using a relatively short-term longitudinal study. More intensive and long-term studies on personal identity remain to be conducted, starting in early adolescence and

extending well into adulthood. Obeidallah, Hauser, and Jacobson (1999) outline three competing hypotheses reflecting three long-term developmental pathways. Some of these ideas are grounded in Erikson's (1950, 1968) epigenetic lifespan theorizing and are very similar, for instance, to those of the life-span approach to vocational development (Super, 1990; Vondracek & Skorikov, this volume). First, the *continuity effect* hypothesis states that individuals who experience optimal functioning in adolescence will also report high levels of well-being in adulthood. Second, the *rebound effect* hypothesis states that initial outcomes associated with developmental match could be short-lived; experiencing optimal psychosocial functioning during adolescence would not necessarily lead to optimal outcomes in adulthood. Third, the *sleepers effect* hypothesis states that the developmental work of adolescence is not accompanied by psychosocial benefits in the short term. Instead, optimal psychosocial functioning appears later on, when one must utilize identity-based resources to cope with the challenges of adulthood.

These three hypotheses emphasize the need to view identity within a life-span framework. The continuity effect hypothesis implies that the detrimental effect of prolonged searching in adolescence and emerging adulthood continues into adulthood. However, the sleeper effect hypothesis implies that the beneficial effects of searching appear primarily once individuals have reached adulthood. Arnett (2000) argues that exploration in emerging adulthood is likely to be beneficial in the long run because it allows individuals to obtain a broad range of life experiences before taking on enduring adult responsibilities (see also Josselson, 1996). Similarly, the continuity effect hypothesis implies that, among the identity trajectory classes that we identified, pathmakers and consolidators continue to demonstrate the most favorable adjustment in adulthood. The rebound effect hypothesis, on the other hand, implies that long-term beneficial effects may not occur for consolidators because they do not explore in breadth during the college years, and as a result, their identities are unlikely to be “updated” during or shortly after this time period.

Antecedents, Correlates, and Consequences of Identity Formation and Evaluation

In the previous section, we outlined the adjustment correlates or consequences of embarking on different identity trajectories during adolescence and emerging adulthood. With respect to trait personality factors, reciprocal influences (as found in cross-lagged analyses) and common developmental pathways (as found in latent growth curve analyses) suggest an interdependent personality-identity system, with mainly neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness influencing or being influenced by identity (Luyckx, Soenens, & Goossens, 2006). More specifically, the developmental trajectory of neuroticism appears to be related to the developmental trajectories of the commitment dimensions (negatively) and exploration in breadth (positively). Further, whereas openness was especially related to exploration across time, conscientiousness influenced and was influenced by the degree to which individuals were able to form and identify with identity commitments. In sum, we found that identity and personality developed as part of a system, each reinforcing the other (Caspi & Roberts, 1999). Not only was it found that trait personality influenced identity processes, but the significant amount of decision-making, competence, and self-reflection that identity formation and evaluation required also tended to promote insight into one's personality and to prompt personality change (Pals, 1999).

Second, within research on family socialization and parenting, there is a strong interest in the construct of psychological control, a parenting dimension highly relevant to the process of identity because it intrudes upon or impedes the adolescent's search for autonomy (Barber, 2002). "[Psychological control] is characterized by a type of interpersonal interaction in which the parent's psychological status and relational position to the child is maintained and defended at the expense and violation of the child's development of self" (Barber, 2002, p. 6). Psychological control creates a climate in which dysfunctional or maladaptive identity processes are initiated or exacerbated, and, conversely, in which the child's self-initiation and self-governing are impaired. As such, psychological control represents the inverse of autonomy-supportive and empathic parenting (Soenens et al., 2007; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, this volume).

Luyckx, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, and Berzonsky (2007) and Beyers and Goossens (2008) conducted a longitudinal study on the four-dimensional identity model and its relationships to constructs such as supportive parenting and psychological control. Findings were in line with transactional models of socialization (e.g., Soenens, Luyckx, Vansteenkiste, & Goossens, 2008): commitment formation and evaluation, and parenting reciprocally influenced each other across time. For example, emerging adults who perceived their parents as intrusively controlling appeared to experience difficulties in establishing clear and committed identity choices across time. Moreover, to the extent that these individuals did manage to make commitments, they were unlikely to identify with them or to experience a sense of certainty and satisfaction. Conversely, a continued exploration in breadth in the college context led to increases in perceived parental psychological control across time. As such, psychological control could also emerge as a reaction to a continuous search for identity alternatives, perhaps because parents might pressure their offspring to “settle down” into firm identity commitments. These parenting strategies, however, are likely to lead to a further forestallment of self-endorsed commitments, as explained above.

Moving Identity Theory and Research Forward

Distinguishing between Ruminative and Adaptive Exploration

Exploration is generally conceived of as being an adaptive process, which facilitates the enactment and the evaluation or strengthening of identity commitments. Indeed, research has found exploration to relate positively to variables such as curiosity and openness to experience (Clancy & Dollinger, 1993; Luyckx, Soenens, & Goossens, 2006). However, identity exploration – and especially prolonged exploration in breadth – might be associated with depressive symptoms and lowered self-esteem (Schwartz et al., 2009). Although these somewhat paradoxical findings may reflect “two sides of exploration,” it is also possible that different components of exploration are associated with openness and with maladjustment. It is possible that exploration can be subdivided into reflective versus ruminative components (Burwell & Shirk, 2007), and the elevated distress

associated with exploration may be indicative of ruminative or maladaptive exploratory processes. Hence, commonly used identity measures may fail to differentiate such a ruminative type of exploration from adaptive forms of exploration and may capture ruminative and reflective sources of variance in exploration, which may relate differentially to psychosocial outcomes.

Similar mixed findings in studies of personality led Trapnell and Campbell (1999) to distinguish between ruminative or maladaptive, and reflective or adaptive, types of private self-attentiveness. Self-rumination is a negative, chronic, and persistent self-attentiveness motivated by fear and perceived threats or losses to the self, whereas self-reflection is motivated by a genuine interest in the self. Others (Treyner, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003) have also distinguished between adaptive types of self-reflection and maladaptive types of self-rumination – the latter being characterized by brooding, that is, an unproductive, passive, and repetitive focus on the self.

Previous research has demonstrated that self-reflection is related to higher levels of personal identity, perspective-taking, and openness, whereas self-rumination is related to lower levels of perspective-taking and higher levels of neuroticism and depressive and anxiety symptoms (Joireman, Parrott, & Hammersla, 2002; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). Further, Ward, Lyubomirsky, Sousa, and Nolen-Hoeksema (2003) have demonstrated that self-rumination is negatively related to commitment to future plans. Similarly, Segerstrom, Tsao, Alde, and Craske (2000) have underscored the importance of both rumination and worry in understanding difficulties and unresolved issues in identity formation. People scoring high on ruminative type of exploration may have difficulty settling on satisfying answers to identity questions. Partially initiated by what they perceive as inadequate progress towards personally important identity goals, they keep asking themselves the same questions, resulting in an intrusive feeling of uncertainty and incompetence.

Ruminative and nonproductive identity processes are increasingly important to examine as the process of developing a sense of identity becomes increasingly difficult. As Arnett (2000) and Côté (2002) have noted, establishing a stable and viable identity has become increasingly challenging for young people in contemporary societies. Today's young people are relatively free from limitations

on their choices and can assume a more active role in their own development (Côté & Levine, 2002; Côté & Schwartz, 2002). Late-modern societies, however, also appear to be increasingly chaotic and less supportive. At the same time, societal pressure on individuals to create their own identity with little external help has increased (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). Some individuals – especially those whom Côté (2002; Côté & Levine, 2002) would characterize in terms of developmental individualization – thrive in such a setting and are successful in developing and forming self-endorsed identity commitments. However, other individuals may become “stuck” in the exploration process, continue to dwell over the different alternatives at hand, and experience considerable difficulty arriving at fully endorsed commitments (Schwartz, Côté, et al., 2005).

Consequently, Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, et al. (2008) extended the four-dimensional identity model by including ruminative exploration, conceptualized as a dimension that would delay or inhibit progress in both the formation and evaluation of identity commitments (sample items read: “I keep wondering which direction my life has to take” and “I worry about what I want to do with my future”). With this new model, some of the previous mixed findings on exploration were clarified. For instance, Luyckx and colleagues found, in two samples of high school and college students, that – when looking at unique variability in each exploration dimension, controlling for the others – ruminative exploration was positively related to depressive and anxiety symptoms and negatively related to self-esteem, commitment making, and identification with commitment. Controlling for ruminative exploration, however, exploration in breadth and exploration in depth were unrelated to adjustment and positively related to both commitment dimensions. Future long-term longitudinal research should investigate whether ruminative exploration is a core developmental variable of identity or whether it is more stable and grounded in individuals’ personality, being related to variables such as rumination and indecisiveness.

Empirically Deriving Identity Statuses

The use of these five dimensions also allowed us to shed additional light on Marcia’s (1966) identity statuses and to empirically address issues that have been raised regarding the identity status

paradigm. For example, several authors have questioned the developmental adequacy of moratorium as a response to the identity stage. To the extent that young people are engaged in a “perpetual moratorium,” they may experience aggravated identity confusion (Berzonsky, 1985; Marcia, 2002). For such individuals, moratorium may be more similar to diffusion than to achievement in terms of decision-making and adjustment (Côté & Schwartz, 2002). As noted, Côté and Levine (2002) described a group of searchers driven by unrealistically high standards for functioning, which undermine their ability to form steady commitments. These individuals seem to be locked in a ruminative cycle because they are unable to find perfection within themselves. Similarly, Helson, Stewart, and Ostrove (1995) distinguished between integrated and unintegrated searchers, with the latter experiencing great difficulty in reconciling or integrating needs and goals with their identities. So there remains a question about whether moratorium is an adaptive response to the task of developing a sense of personal identity or whether the distress associated with active exploration is part of a temporary transition toward identity consolidation.

Through the use of cluster analysis using these five identity dimensions, Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, and colleagues (2008) indeed found the moratorium cluster to score equally high on ruminative exploration as on exploration in breadth and in depth (as opposed to the achievement cluster, which scored high on exploration in breadth and in depth and low on ruminative exploration). Consequently, following Côté and Levine (2002) and Helson et al. (1995), this type of moratorium might denote some type of arrested development (as is the case with diffusion; Orlofsky, Marcia, & Lesser, 1973), blocking some individuals from forming commitments.

With respect to the diffusion status, Luyckx and colleagues (e.g., Luyckx et al., 2005; Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, et al., 2008) empirically differentiated between two diffusion clusters, carefree diffusion and diffused diffusion, with diffused diffusion scoring high on ruminative exploration and maladjustment. Carefree diffusion was characterized by an untroubled approach toward identity, and individuals in this cluster did not appear to be distressed by their current lack of strong identity commitments. Marcia (1989) also delineated between carefree and pathological

types of diffusion. Archer and Waterman (1990) also distinguished between apathetic and commitment-avoiding diffusions. Whereas the former display an “I don’t care” attitude to mask underlying insecurities, the latter appear to enjoy their current lack of commitments and to evidence a “playboy-type” character (Berzonsky, 1985).

With respect to the committed statuses (i.e., the achievement and foreclosure clusters), the use of this extended model shed interesting empirical light on how these two statuses exactly differ. Not only were, as expected, achieved individuals characterized by high scores on adaptive exploration (whereas foreclosed individuals had low scores on these dimensions), achieved individuals also scored higher on commitment making and especially identification with commitment in a number of samples (e.g., Luyckx et al., 2005), again testifying to the importance of assessing both dimensions. Apparently, foreclosed individuals not only differ from achieved individuals in the strength of their commitments but also, and especially, in the degree to which they identify with their commitments. Apparently, foreclosed individuals feel less immersed and involved in and enthusiastic about their commitments, probably due in part to their closed outlook on life and their lack of exploratory strategies in dealing with identity issues. This finding is in line with previous research demonstrating that foreclosed individuals feel less autonomous and personally expressive as achieved individuals do (Luyckx et al., 2009; Waterman, 2007) and scored lower on a measure of identity synthesis (Schwartz et al., 2010).

In sum, with respect to these empirically derived identity statuses, the obtained cluster-solutions provided a further validation of Marcia’s (1966; Kroger & Marcia, this volume) seminal identity status paradigm in that Marcia’s four identity statuses emerged (irrespective of the specific identity questionnaires used to derive the statuses; e.g., Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, & Meeus, 2008), with some additional variants being identified. Relatedly, in a series of Belgian studies, these statuses were obtained in samples of high school and college students, emerging and young adult employees, and emerging adults afflicted with a chronic illness. Further, a large-scale study on 10,000 US college students resulted in similar identity clusters as in the Belgian studies and these

clusters were further validated on a broad range of outcome measures (Schwartz, Luyckx, et al., 2010).

New Correlates, Target Groups, and Methodologies

New correlates. Given that perfectionism essentially deals with how individuals set and pursue standards, this personality dimension is thought to be an important determinant of the identity development process (Campbell & DiPaula, 2002). Luyckx, Soenens, Goossens, Beckx, and Wouters (2008) demonstrated that maladaptive (or neurotic) and adaptive types of perfectionism (Flett & Hewitt, 2002) were differentially related to the five identity dimensions, providing insight in some of the mechanisms involved in identity formation and evaluation. Central to the concept of perfectionism is the setting of high standards that provide motivation to engage in proactive and goal-directed behaviors. To the extent that individuals are able to flexibly adjust and re-evaluate their standards in accordance with life events, experiences, and situational demands, these standards indeed may provide them with a sense of purpose and goal-directedness (Hamacheck, 1978). Luyckx, Soenens, Goossens, and colleagues (2008) indeed found that such “adaptive” perfectionism appeared to facilitate exploration in breadth and exploration in depth, as well as commitment making and the subsequent identification with the commitments that are enacted. The setting of high standards, however, becomes maladaptive perfectionism when individuals rigidly adhere to their standards and chronically engage in negative self-evaluations (Shafran & Mansell, 2001). As such, perfectionism creates vulnerability for maladjustment because such “neurotic” perfectionists tend to define their self-worth in terms of achieving these unrealistic standards. Luyckx, Soenens, Goossens, et al. (2008) found that maladaptive perfectionism was associated with a ruminative approach to identity exploration and appeared to inhibit both commitment dimensions. It appears that, through the process of ruminative exploration, neurotic perfectionists continue to focus on unrealistic identity standards instead of on goal-directed identity work, such as proactive exploration or commitment making. As such, neurotic or maladaptive perfectionism interferes with the development of an integrated set of identity commitments.

Schwartz, Luyckx, et al. (2010) focused on the practical applicability and public health relevance of the identity statuses by relating them to health-compromising behaviors such as illicit drug use, unsafe sexual behavior, and drunk driving. Foreclosure and achievement tended to be associated with the lowest levels of health risk behaviors, especially illicit drug use and impaired driving. Apparently, either type of commitment (foreclosed or achieved) is sufficient to protect against health-compromising behaviors but these effects may occur for different reasons: conformity and obedience in foreclosed individuals versus advanced moral reasoning and decision making in achieved individuals (Krettenauer, 2005). Self-reported rates of dangerous drug use were between two and three times greater in the carefree diffusion status than in any of the other statuses. Carefree-diffused participants were also significantly more likely to engage in hazardous alcohol use, to ride with a drunk driver, and to have sexual relations with a stranger. Therefore, failing to engage in any meaningful identity activity – which defines the carefree diffusion status and differentiates it from diffused diffusion (in which some exploration, albeit ruminative and nonproductive, is taking place) – may pose serious health hazards that can place the person at risk for serious injury, illness, or death. A lack of consideration for the future appeared to be associated with the highest likelihood of engaging in present-oriented, hedonistic, dangerous behaviors (Luyckx, Lens, Smits, & Goossens, in press; Zimbardo, Keough, & Boyd, 1997).

New target groups. Most of the research discussed so far has focused exclusively on high school or college students. Consequently, an important aim of our recent work has been to validate the five-dimensional identity model in new target groups and demonstrate the usefulness of studying identity formation and evaluation processes in young people outside the high school or college context (Schwartz, 2005). Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, and Pollock (2008) studied identity development in a sample of employed, non-student emerging adults and found that specific identity dimensions – and especially the degree to which identity commitments are made – were associated with achieving a subjective sense of adulthood. Subjective adulthood is important to study because it may be protective against depressive symptoms and against extensive drug and alcohol use

(Nelson & Barry, 2005). Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, and Pollock (2008) found that employed young people scored higher on commitment making as compared to college students, which partially explained the higher subjective adulthood scores among employed emerging adults.

Relatedly, Luyckx and colleagues (2010) derived identity statuses in a sample of 21-40 year old employees and these employees were found to function substantially different in their jobs depending on the identity status in which they were classified (these differences remained rather stable across one year). As expected, achieved individuals scored substantially higher on job engagement and substantially lower on job burnout as compared to individuals in the diffused diffusion status. Whereas foreclosed individuals generally scored as low as achieved individuals on indices of job burnout across time, they scored significantly lower on job dedication and especially job absorption, not differing from diffused individuals with respect to the latter variable. Apparently, although foreclosed individuals are not necessarily experiencing more burnout than their achieved counterparts, they do feel less immersed and involved in and enthusiastic about their work. As mentioned before, in the case of foreclosure, individuals did not thoroughly explore possible future life-plans and potentially foreclosed on a job that they not fully endorsed, a phenomenon referred to as experiencing work as a job instead of as a calling (Skorikov & Vondracek, this volume).

Finally, in one of the first studies in this direction, Luyckx, Seiffge-Krenke, and colleagues (2008) recruited a sample of emerging adults with a chronic illness, that is, Type 1 diabetes. Luyckx and colleagues examined the ways in which identity processes affected general and illness-specific measures of well-being through their influence on illness-specific coping strategies. They found that achieving a sense of identity appeared to facilitate problem-focused strategies in coping with diabetes and with the daily diabetes management regimen, as well as to facilitate integrating the illness into one's sense of self. In sum, a strong personal identity seems to be an important internal resource partially determining how individuals deal with a chronic illness or, possibly, by extension, with a wide range of (chronic) stressors.

New methodologies. Based on the identity model forwarded by Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus (2008) and inspired by the work of Kernis and colleagues (Heppner & Kernis, this volume; Kernis, Granneman, & Barclay, 1989), Klimstra and colleagues (in press) focused on the short-term or daily dynamics of identity formation and, more specifically, on the interplay between making and reconsidering identity commitments. Findings indicated that identity formation processes operate on a day-to-day basis with commitment and reconsideration of commitment mutually influencing each other from one day to another. Further, intra-individual fluctuations in these identity dimensions from one day to another proved to be important predictors of subsequent levels of these same identity dimensions and psychosocial outcomes such as depression and anxiety (Schwartz, Klimstra, et al., 2010). More specifically, large fluctuations in reconsideration of commitments from one day to another were related to higher subsequent levels of reconsideration, depression, and anxiety, and to lower subsequent levels of identity commitments. Apparently, being certain about one's commitments one day but doubting them the next day might signal a moratorium-like state, resulting in feelings of distress and a lowered sense of experiencing an overall synthesized identity.

Suggestions for Intervention and Counseling

Interventions to promote healthy identity development might be most relevant in contemporary societies that lack structure and guidance on which to rely in forming and maintaining a sense of identity (Côté, 2000; Schwartz, 2001). Interventions have as their primary objective to facilitate movement from a less coherent sense of identity to a more synthesized identity in order to reduce confusion and uncertainty (Josselson, 1994). As noted, in line with Erikson's (1968) epigenetic principle of lifespan development, the sense of identity developed in adolescence and emerging adulthood also helps to determine one's success in addressing subsequent developmental tasks in adulthood. Hence, such an integrated sense of identity is crucial because it helps to unify the various aspects of one's life and everyday experiences, thereby providing a sense of direction and meaning in one's life (Schwartz, Kurtines, et al., 2005). A

number of identity intervention studies have been conducted, primarily targeting skills such as decision making, social perspective taking, and problem solving (Enright, Olson, Ganiere, Lapsley, & Buss, 1984; Markstrom-Adams, Ascione, Braegger, & Adams, 1993). Results suggested that several identity processes, such as generating identity alternatives, can be improved by way of intervention. However, follow-up data appear to suggest that intervention gains may not be maintained (Ferrer-Wreder et al., 2002). To strengthen long-term effects of intervention programs, additional follow-up activities might need to be conducted after the intervention has ended.

It is important to bear in mind that virtually none of the identity statuses or trajectories described in the present chapter are universally healthy or unhealthy (Josselson, 1994). Further, interventions should not be instituted for the purpose of undermining existing identity commitments, even those formed in a non-reflective or foreclosed manner. The extent to which an identity commitment is serving adaptive functions may be more important than the manner in which it was formed. When a commitment is perceived as functional, there is a natural, and appropriate, resistance to efforts to change or undermine it. For instance, for some guardians or foreclosures, exploring identity issues might be threatening due to the guilt and anxiety associated with questioning introjected or internalized parental values. However, if at some future time a commitment is no longer functional, intervention or guidance might be needed for some to find personally meaningful alternatives that can provide a base for new commitments (Waterman, 1994) or, in the ideal case scenario, new commitments that are personally expressive and, as such, provide a base for self-discovery (Waterman, this volume). Schwartz, Kurtines, et al. (2005) demonstrated that such a process of self-discovery can be stimulated through certain emotionally focused strategies.

Marcia (1980) indicated that individuals in moratorium would be most likely to appear for counseling due to the distress associated with ongoing exploration. Instead of exploring in a systematic or focused manner, some searchers seem to be ruminating and drifting (Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Soenens, et al., 2008). Consequently, their continuous explorations are

associated with disappointment, depressive symptoms, and insecurity. However, for other searchers, these explorations are illuminating for self-understanding and self-discovery (Schwartz, 2002). In other words, a continuous identity search may represent a source of instability or disruption for some (Orlofsky et al., 1973), but may be beneficial for others. However, it seems fair to say that exploration should result in commitment making at some point. So, a thorough exploration of alternatives needs to be valued, rather than discouraged, although some individuals might need some guidance through the provision of structure and autonomy support (Luyckx, Soenens, Goossens, & Vansteenkiste, 2007; see Soenens & Vansteenkiste, this volume, for a thorough review on the role of autonomy support in personal identity development). Individuals who present for counseling regarding identity issues might be characterized by indecisiveness or maladaptive perfectionism, which generalizes across situations and which leaves them unable to enact or maintain commitments. They experience fear when engaged in decision-making processes and, consequently, they avoid making decisions and turn to rumination or procrastination (Rassin & Muris, 2005). Such chronic decisional procrastination is likely to produce feelings of incompetence and maladaptive functioning (Luyckx, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, & Duriez, 2009), and, as such, these individuals may seek some sort of counseling.

In conclusion, our goal in this chapter has been to sketch some of the advantages of an explicitly process-oriented approach to personal identity (with a focus on both commitment formation and evaluation and incorporating both adaptive and maladaptive types of exploration) and to demonstrate its usefulness as a complementary approach to current identity research. We hope that our approach, combined with others described in this book and elsewhere, will inspire more integrative studies and advance both conceptualizations of identity and future applications of identity constructs to important social and public health issues.

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