Identity development and the construction of self: Findings and implications from the Forum BEVI Project

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Identity Development and the Construction of Self:
Findings and Implications from the Forum BEVI Project

Jessica Spaeth

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Psychology

Department of Graduate Psychology

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Abstract

The current study focuses on factor analytic and correlational matrix data from the Forum BEVI Project (www.ibavi.org/content/featured-projects/), a national learning assessment initiative, with a particular emphasis on the “Identity Diffusion” scale from the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI). Results suggest that the relative degree to which an individual is undifferentiated from his or her parents, experiences a foreclosed identity, and reports a troubled childhood is associated with a wide range of capacities and beliefs about self, others, and the world at large such as emotional expressiveness as well as environmental, cultural, and global concerns. Because Identity Diffusion is central to Equilintegration Theory (EI Theory), the EI Self, and the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI), issues of definition, measurement, and theory are considered vis-à-vis this model, framework, and method along with an examination of factor analytic and correlation matrix data from the BEVI, which are relevant to a deeper understanding of this construct.
Introduction

The concept of “identity” has long occupied theorists and researchers examining human condition. To highlight briefly a few exemplars, the concept of “identity status” (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia, 1966, 1980) focuses on exploration and commitment as foundational processes of self-development. Narrative approaches (McAdams et al., 2006) emphasize the constructed sense of identity that manifests through one’s subjectively experienced and expressed life story. The idea of “possible selves” (Oyserman & James, 2011) refers to potential identities that one wishes to realize or avoid. Social identity theory (Spears, 2011; Tajfel, 1982) is concerned with how individuals derive a sense of self in relation to their perceive membership in specific social groups. As a final example, role-based identity theories (e.g., Stryker, 2004) focus on how identity emerges from the social roles, such as e.g., mother or doctor, that one assumes. For a comprehensive review of these and other perspectives on identity, see Vignoles et al. (2011).

In addition to theories of identity, allied perspectives have focused upon the associated outcomes of particular identity statuses. More specifically, among other sequelae, the relative degree to which individuals are—or are not—able to achieve and express a clear and stable sense of “who they are” has been associated with multiple aspects of human development and functioning, from the selection and pursuit of careers (Skorikov & Vondracek, 1998) and relationships (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010) to problem-solving, decision-making (Berman et al., 2001), and meaning making (Berzonsky et al., 2011). A clear and coherent sense of identity has been associated with positive self-image and a lower likelihood of externalizing or internalizing symptoms of
psychological distress (Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2011; Schwartz et al., 2010). Likewise, when compared to their peers, such “identity synthesized” individuals also are more likely to feel positive about, and confident in, their decisions, more likely to engage in enjoyable relationships, and less likely to engage in harmful behaviors toward self and others (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Luyckx et al., 2005). On the other hand, a diffused sense of identity—which can take either the form of disinterest in identity exploration (i.e., “carefree diffusion”) or a willingness to engage in identity exploration, but not having the psychological resources to do so (i.e., “diffused diffusion”) (Schwartz, 2001)—is associated with a range of internalizing and externalizing symptoms, such as illicit drug use and sexual risk taking (Schwartz et al., 2008; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Wang, & Olthuis, 2009).

**The Equilintegration (EI) Framework and Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI)**

Despite much work on the nature of identity, for example, what it is and the outcomes associated with particular identities, like what it does, less attention has been directed to questions of how and why identity develops as it does have received less attention. Thus, in this chapter, we describe theory and data from a multi-year, multi-institution assessment of learning initiative called the Forum BEVI Project, which may help illuminate the antecedents of identity development in general and identity diffusion in particular. Although a full explication of the Forum BEVI Project is presented in Chapter X, a brief overview of the three main components that are integral to this project—Equilintegration (EI) Theory, the EI Self, and Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI)—may be helpful at the outset. Basically, Equilintegration (EI) Theory seeks to
explain “the processes by which beliefs, values, and ‘worldviews’ are acquired and maintained, why their alteration is typically resisted, and how and under what circumstances their modification occurs” (Shealy, 2004, pp. 1075). Derivative of EI Theory (Shealy, 2004), the Equilintegration or EI Self explains integrative and synergistic processes by which beliefs and values are acquired, maintained, and transformed as well as how and why these are linked to the formative variables, core needs, and adaptive potential of the self (Shealy, 2013). Informed by scholarship in a range of key areas, including: “needs-based” research and theory; developmental psychopathology; social cognition; affect regulation; psychotherapy processes and outcomes; theories and models of “self”, the EI Self seeks to illustrate how the interaction between our core needs (e.g., for attachment, affiliation) and formative variables (e.g., caregiver, culture) results in beliefs and values about self, others, and the world at large that we all internalize over the course of development and across the life span.

Concomitant with EI Theory and the EI Self, the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI) is a comprehensive analytic tool in development since the early 1990s that examines how and why we come to see ourselves, others, and the larger world as we do (e.g., how life experiences, culture, and context affect our beliefs, values, and worldview) as well as the influence of such processes on multiple aspects of human functioning (e.g., learning processes, relationships, personal growth, the pursuit of life goals). For example, the BEVI assesses processes such as: basic openness; the tendency to (or not to) stereotype in particular ways; self- and emotional awareness; preferred strategies for making sense of why “other” people and cultures “do what they do”; global engagement (e.g., receptivity to different cultures, religions, and social practices); and
worldview shift (e.g., to what degree do beliefs and values change as a result of specific experiences). BEVI results are translated into reports at the individual, group, and organizational levels and used in a variety of contexts for applied and research purposes (e.g., to track and examine changes in worldviews over time) (cf., Isley et al., 1999; Hayes et al., 1999; Pysarchik et al., 2007; Shealy, 2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2013; Shealy et al., 1999;).

In addition to data from an original exploratory factor analysis, analyses for this chapter were developed on the basis of a large dataset (N = 2331) collected during 2011—2012 from the Forum BEVI Project, a multi-institution, multi-year project coordinated by the Forum on Education Abroad (www.forumea.org) and International Beliefs and Values Institute (www.ibavi.org). Participants primarily included undergraduate students (96.7%), although a small sample of graduate students (3.3%) also was included. The sample ranged between the ages of 17—26, with an average age of 19; 3.9% fell into the age range of 26—62, with another .9 % falling into the range between 12—17. Although the majority of participants reported as U.S. citizens (93.3%), non-U.S. citizens also were included in the sample (N = 156 or 6.7%). Also, participants were drawn from 38 different countries of origin. Of the sample, 79.9 percent of the reported as Caucasian with 20.1% as non-Caucasian (6.6% Black or African American; .9% American Indian or Alaskan Native; 7.4% Asian or Pacific Islander; Hispanic / Latino 2.9%; Other, 3%). Finally, from the standpoint of gender, 40.8 percent of the sample was female, with 59.2 male. All participants were required to provide informed consent as determined by multiple Institutional Review Boards processes, and participation was entirely voluntary (e.g., participants were not required to complete the
BEVI, and could elect to discontinue participation at any time). Analyses were conducted via SPSS and MPLUS, and consist of ANOVAs, regression analyses, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (for more information about the Forum BEVI Project, including a description of BEVI scales, see www.ibavi.org/content/featured-projects).

Beliefs, Values, and Identity Development

Consistent with the EI framework and BEVI, multiple constructs and variables have been invoked to describe or explain identity, including personal goals, beliefs, and values (Marcia, 1966; Waterman, 1999), self-esteem and reflexive self-evaluations (Kernis et al., 2008), and one’s unique and overarching life story (McAdams et al., 2006).

Moreover, various theoretical arguments have been advanced regarding the processes by which the “self” is organized. For example, Showers and Zeigler-Hill (2003) describe the process of “self-organization” as including positive and negative self-beliefs, and the way these self-beliefs are compartmentalized or integrated into aspects of overall self-concept. Additionally, self-organization is observed to be more about how accessible self-beliefs are, rather than how many positive versus negative self-beliefs exist, and it is the accessibility of the self-beliefs that guide the formation of self-concept and influence an individual’s behavior, cognitive capacities and emotional reactions (Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2003). As may be evident, then, many theoretical approaches to identity focus on the development and composition of “beliefs and values” —as well as how individuals experience themselves, others, and the larger world. These fundamental identity processes are central to the Equilintegration (EI) model and the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI) method discussed in this chapter.
Indeed, a number of identity theories assume that beliefs and values represent the foundation of identity. For example, Berzonsky & Neimeyer (1988) and Berzonsky (1990, 2003) conceptualize identity as a self-theory (cf. Epstein, 1980), which represents an amalgamation of “personal constructs, assumptions, hypotheses, beliefs, schemas, and postulates relevant to the self-interacting in the world” (Berzonsky, 2011, pp. 56). Waterman (2007, 2011) defines self-discovery as the uncovering of one’s basic talents and potentials—which, if the self-discovery process is successful, become integral to core values and beliefs. A number of theorists have postulated that individuals maintain epistemological self-theories that guide decisions and courses of action, such as Berzonsky (2011). This “self-theory” includes knowledge, strategies, and skills that facilitate adaptation to daily challenges; one’s effectiveness in this regard is evaluated in terms of subjectively held goals and values and the individual’s ability to respond and adapt to life situations. To adapt to and cope with dynamic conditions and possibilities in our world, Berzonsky (1990, 2003, 2011) describes how existing identity structures both receive information and adjust themselves to accommodate information that is incompatible with one’s existing sense of identity (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001).

Overall, individuals who have a more coherent and flexible sense of identity, more proactive coping skills (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Folkman, 2010), and greater perceived control over their decisions are better able to adapt to and cope with difficult life situations, as referenced by Ajzen (2002, 2012) in the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2012; Jopp & Schmitt, 2010).

Among other processes that influence the development of one’s identity—what are called “formative variables” from an Equilintegration (EI) standpoint—is the Zeitgeist
in which one’s identity develops. Defined as “the influence exerted by the sharing of the
values and ideas prevailing in the social environment of each generation” (Vedder et al.,
2009, pp. 642), one’s Zeitgeist includes, but is not limited to, one’s culture, context,
political and religious orientations, and spoken language. Such processes interact with
other formative variables, such as our life experiences and relations with caregivers, to
influence not only the nature and form of the beliefs and values that are inculcated by and
within us, but the personal and professional identities we ultimately assume (Shealy,
1995, 2005). Thus, in contemplating the antecedents of identity, it is important to
acknowledge not only the specific formative variables that interacted to shape what we
become, and who we say we are, but the sociocultural structures and dynamics that
predominated during such processes of development. As the Equilintegration model
maintains,

Beliefs and values are determined by an individual’s history, larger culture, and
unique Zeitgeist, inculcated over time, and may or may not transcend a specific
time and place. Although that which is believed and valued may be relative to a
given time or place, the human capacity and need for an organizing worldview is
an etic derivative of the self; thus, although the content of our beliefs and values
may vary as a function of what is available for acquisition, the processes (e.g.,
developmental, affective, attributional) by which beliefs and values are acquired
are determined by constitutive aspects of the self (Shealy, 2004, pp. 1083).

From the standpoint of antecedents, the implications of such a perspective for cross-
cultural perspectives on the development of identity should be clear since what we belief
and value depends in no small part on what was available for acquisition. For example,
young people in largely open Western societies have a great deal of potential values and beliefs from which to choose, whereas young people in hierarchically structured societies are more likely to be expected to internalize values and beliefs from family members or other elders (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2006). Further, the extent to which the prevailing social structure can be challenged varies from one cultural context to the next (Cheng & Berman, in press; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Meca, & Ritchie, in press). In short, from an EI perspective, and integral to the Forum BEVI Project—which examines international, multicultural, and transformative learning—these very processes must be accounted for when attempting to understand not only what beliefs and values comprise identity an individual and aggregate level, but why differences and similarities occur as they do within and between cultures.

The Structure and Process of Identity: Neo-Eriksonian Perspectives

Although there are many frameworks on identity, the EI perspective is most consistent with, and informed by, Erik Erikson and the neo-Eriksonian perspectives, particularly regarding the acquisition, maintenance, and transformation of beliefs and values. By way of brief review, Erikson (1968) characterized identity development as:

employ[ing] a process of simultaneous reflection and observation […] the process described is always changing and developing: at its best it is a process of increasing differentiation, and it becomes ever more inclusive as the individual grows aware of a widening circle of others significant to him, from the maternal person to ‘mankind’ (pp. 22-23).

Erikson’s (1950) lifespan theory of identity development inspired the identity status approach (Kroger & Marcia, 2011)—which in turn has stimulated a number of
more specific models referring to the development of personal goals, values, and beliefs. These extensions of Erikson’s and Marcia’s approaches have included but are by no means limited to, social-cognitive accounts of the ways in which identity is constructed (Berzonsky, 2003, 2004, 2008), humanistic perspectives on self-realization and self-discovery (Waterman, 2007, 2011), and sociological perspectives on how identity-related skills and knowledge are used to pursue one’s “core needs” as well as roles, positions, and other social resources (Côté, 1996; Côté & Levine, 2002; Shealy, 2013). The common denominator among these various “neo-Eriksonian” approaches is that they focus on the development of a coherent sense of self, which is experienced by self and expressed to others and the larger world.

Although Erikson (1968) only briefly referred to the concept of “psychological foreclosure” with regard to the identity process, Marcia (1966) distinguished four identity statuses based on the degree of exploration and/or commitment in which an adolescent engages. Of these four—achieved, foreclosed, moratorium, and diffused—the current chapter focuses on the processes associated with foreclosed, and especially diffused, identity statuses. Identity diffusion indicates that an adolescent has not yet made identity commitments and may—or may not have—explored among identity alternatives (Meeus et al., 2010). On the other hand, foreclosure represents enacting commitments without much prior exploration. Foreclosed identity commitments are generally implemented based on the choices, preferences, and values of significant others (Berzonsky, 2008). Valde (1996) further expands on identity foreclosure, identifying “identity closure” as a fifth category, which represents a “combination of the strength of certainty and the weakness of inflexibility” (pp. 253). Similarly, Meeus et al. (2010) use the term “early
closure” to refer to foreclosure among early adolescents. Especially in Western societies, foreclosure is often characterized as developmentally inadequate (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). However, in many non-Western contexts—and in ethnic minority families and communities in Western countries—foreclosure is often the most adaptive resolution to identity issues. In short, foreclosure may be adaptive in many cases, and it does not necessarily indicate a default on the identity development process. Again, the context in which identity development occurs is a very important variable to consider.

Some research has suggested that identity foreclosure carries different psychological meanings depending upon the developmental pathway by which it occurs. For example, Meeus et al. (2010) differentiate between “early closures” and “closures”. Early closure individuals begin and stay in a foreclosed status, possess strong identity commitments early on, and do not engage in in-depth exploration of who they are and might become. In contrast, adolescents in a “closure” status are considered more developmentally advanced than individuals in “early closure,” but have not engaged in in-depth exploration of what their current commitments are or might become. With regard to “healthy” adaptation, Waterman (2007) emphasizes the negative relationship between foreclosure and psychological well being in a Western context. Although the process of making commitments has been observed to operate similarly in Western and East Asian cultures, the process of identity exploration does not appear to process the same in East Asian countries as it does in Western cultural contexts (Cheng & Berman, in press). Although identity achievement (considered to be optimal) and identity foreclosure both involve the process of deriving identity commitments, identity foreclosure does so without a concomitant and subjective experience of autonomy. However, in an East
Asian context, the individual agency of commitment making may not be as important to, or adaptive with, the more collectivist sense of self which appears to predominate (Cheng & Berman).

The process of commitment making is also associated with fundamental aspects of emotional functioning. For example, individuals in the Achieved and Foreclosed statuses tend to report lower levels of depressive symptoms (Meeus, 1996), anxiety (Berman et al., 2006), substance use (Schwartz et al., 2011), and aggression (Crocetti et al., 2008) as well as relatively high levels of emotional stability and self-esteem (Luyckx et al., 2005). However, the enactment of commitments, in itself, does not appear sufficient to establish feelings of eudaimonic well being in Western societies (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Importantly, the relative autonomy, referred to as “volition” of self-concordant goals has been shown to be predictive of well-being outcomes in cross-cultural research, suggesting that the autonomy of one’s goals may matter, regardless of collectivist or individualist context (Chirkov & Ryan, 2000). In Western societies, however, the strength of autonomous identity commitments has been associated positively with vigilant decision making and associated negatively with procrastination, rationalization, and the tendency to experience self-consciousness (Berzonsky, 1990; 1992). In contrast, for cultures that are more interdependent and relational, the association between self-consistency and psychological well being is weaker; as such, the goal of Chinese adolescents may tend toward “self-in relation” rather than an “autonomous self” (Cross et al., 2003; Lam, 1997, pp. 108).

Although both foreclosed and achieved statuses show similar variants of contentment and self-esteem, achieved commitments appear to be associated with a sense
of purpose, direction, and autonomy. An achieved sense of identity is most important in Western societies where individualized decision-making is prioritized over loyalty and obligation to the family or other social group (Schwartz, Donnellan, et al., in press). Indeed, in many Western countries, young people are expected to navigate the transition to adulthood largely on their own. Individuals in foreclosure may rigidly hold their commitments, and this lack of flexibility may not be as adaptive in the face of changing and/or challenging life circumstances (Schwartz et al., 2011). Unlike the achieved and foreclosed statuses, adolescents in the identity diffusion status are marked by making no commitments and having an undefined sense of self (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Individuals in Identity diffusion also scored lowest on a measure of intimacy and were self-revealing in a situational intimacy task (Kinsler, 1972).

On the basis of the above overview—and informed by the findings from the Forum BEVI Project—what do the Equilintegration (EI) model and Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI) method suggest regarding the structure of identity in general and the antecedents of identity in particular? Although a number of BEVI scales have relevance to definitional and etiological matters regarding identity, the scale of Identity Diffusion (ID) is most directly related to the neo-Eriksonian perspectives described above. Operationally, Identity Diffusion on the BEVI refers to “the degree to which an individual is undifferentiated from parents, experiences a foreclosed identity, reports a troubled childhood, feels little agency or ability to affect change, reports odd or unusual etiological perspectives, and is searching but feels helpless, lost and confused” (Shealy, 1972).

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1 The editor expresses gratitude to Seth Schwartz, Ph.D. for his many excellent contributions to this chapter including the recommendation that this BEVI scale, originally labeled “Identity Closure,” be renamed “Identity Diffusion.”
Along these lines, it may be instructive to review a sampling of items that load statistically on Identity Diffusion.

*I have to admit that I am just like my parents.*

*I am the way I am because I was born that way.*

*I have gone through a painful identity crisis.*

*I never felt like I was good enough for my family.*

Even though we expect them to be, men are not really built to be faithful in marriage.

*Beings from other planets have helped our species.*

*Parents should stay together for the sake of their children.*

Consideration of this statistically derived constellation of items (from exploratory factor analysis) is instructive at a number of levels. For example, Erikson (1968) describes a period between adolescence and adulthood called “institutionalized moratoria”, in which adolescents are granted freedom to explore and experiment with various roles. During this time, young people in Western societies may be able to try out and experience new ways of doing and being without the attendant requirement to accept or choose a specific set of role commitments (Arnett, 2000, 2007). Importantly, emerging adulthood is characterized by a relatively high degree of freedom to explore and experiment with the enactment of different roles—and their corresponding beliefs and values—in areas such as career, partnership, and relationships with one’s family of origin (Schwartz et al., 2005). If the emerging adult stage is either too structured or unstructured, exploration will either be unduly constrained or insufficiently guided (Côté, 2000). That is, parents and other authority figures remain important during emerging adulthood, and young people often remain somewhat emotionally and financially dependent on their parents.
well into their 20s (Arnett, 2011). However, although emerging adulthood refers to various cultural contexts to differing extents, the extent to which young people can “delay” full adulthood varies considerably across cultural contexts (Schwartz, Donnellan, et al., in press). In some Eastern countries, young people are expected to take over the family business, marry someone of their parents’ choosing, or continue to reside in the familial home well into adulthood. Such cultural constraints will affect the extent to which emerging adulthood—and Erikson’s psychosocial moratorium—is possible or feasible (Cheng & Berman, in press).

As may be inferred from the constellation of sample items that load statistically on Identity Diffusion, an overarching experience of a troubled childhood, feelings of pain and crisis, the sense of “stuckness”, and paranormal claims, such as, “Beings from other planets have helped our species” appear to characterize a high degree of Identity Diffusion. Interestingly, part of what appears to capture individuals in such a status is that they simultaneously recognize what was undesirable about their upbringing or familial dynamics. However, these individuals still seek to maintain a sense of connection for the sake of family or loved ones, thus tending to adopt beliefs and values that keep them in such an undesirable position and do not threaten their primary relationships. Such a struggle seems reminiscent, in many ways, of the insecure attachment status described poignantly by Bowlby (1980), and is consistent with the frequently observed clinical reality that even children and youth who have experienced “physical or sexual abuse, exploitation, humiliation, and rejection—still remain fiercely loyal to their family of origin, often clinging tenaciously to the hope that things at home can be put right” (Shealy, 1995, pp. 575; Shealy, Bhuyan, & Sternberger, in press). Correspondingly,
Arseth et al. (2009) found that individuals in the diffuse identity status had the lowest mean proportion of secure attachment when compared to the other three identity statuses and that a diffuse status was negatively correlated with secure attachment. Likewise, as implied by the above constellation of items, a high degree of “identity diffusion” on the BEVI also appears indicative of a lack of self-exploration (Valde, 1996), in that such individuals have accepted their fate, even as they recognize the unfortunate implications of doing so, and have eschewed a process of “institutionalized moratoria,” not allowing such exploration to occur. In the development of the diffuse identity status, a trademark characteristic has been a tendency to be “relatively directionless, unconcerned about their lack of commitment, and easily swayed by external influences” (Kroger & Marcia, 2011, pp. 34). Although individuals in diffusion may still cling to their caregivers, such inclinations appear intertwined with a recognition that all was not right with one’s upbringing or family of origin, even as there was, and is, no other way to exist or move forward in life (Shealy, 1995; Shealy, Bhuyan, & Sternberger, in press).

The Relationship of Identity Diffusion to other BEVI Constructs

On the basis of the above operationalization of Identity Diffusion, further illumination of this construct is possible by considering its relationship to a range of other constructs on the BEVI. As will be demonstrated below, from an EI perspective—and on the basis of correlation matrix data (see http://www.thebevi.com/docs/bevi_scale_pairwise_correlations_and_significance_levels.pdf)—a clear relationship exists between formative variables (e.g., life history; background) and the degree of Identity Diffusion that is reported on the BEVI. Moreover, from the standpoint of developmental psychopathology and its
approach toward understanding mediators of adjustment (Cummings et al., 2002), a high, or low, degree of Identity Diffusion also is associated with other aspects of how the individual experiences self, others, and the world at large. In Table 1 below, we report the relationships of Identity Diffusion to other BEVI Scales, which are derived from correlational matrix data (Spaeth et al., 2010). Note from Table 1 that the internal consistency of ID is .82. Likewise, the “21” refers to the fact that this scale was extracted via promax exploratory factor analysis using SPSS as the 21st factor. Finally, the below correlated factors on the BEVI are all statistically related to Identity Diffusion, and are listed in descending order of magnitude.

Table 1. Correlation Matrix Comparing Identity Diffusion to Other BEVI Scales

| Scale 3. Identity Diffusion (.82, SF 21) (undifferentiated from parents, identity is foreclosed, troubled childhood, feels little agency or ability to affect change, searching and lost but feels helpless, confused) |
| Needs Closure (.84) |
| Sociocultural Openness (-.71) |
| Socioemotional Convergence (-.69) |
| Negative Life Events (.66) |
| Emotional Attunement (-.63) |
| Ecological Resonance (-.49) |
| Hard Structure (.42) |
| Divergent Determinism (.42) |
| Socioreligious Traditionalism (.24) |

2 Along with other criterion-based strategies for factor reduction, only those factors that had an eigenvalue of at least 2, item loadings of at least .30, and internal consistencies of at least .75 were retained.
Based upon such correlation matrix findings, the relationship between Identity Diffusion and the above constructs from the BEVI helps illuminate how and why individuals interpret experiences and negotiate the meaning and purpose of their lives (see Erikson, 1968) including, but not limited to, self-evaluation, self-esteem, life satisfaction, life purpose, personal meaning, and eudaimonic well-being (see Diener et al., 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989; Waterman, 2007). Although “identity” has been related to many of these aspects of human existence, the empirical linkages among hypothesized causal pathways and outcomes are often not well specified (Harter, 1999; Shealy, 2013). Thus, we move next to an examination of identity antecedents, by focusing specifically on the etiology of Identity Diffusion.

From an Equilintegration (EI) perspective (Shealy, 2004; see also Shealy, 2013, Chapter X), beliefs and values about self, others, and the larger world – including those related to Identity Diffusion – have etiological origins in an interaction between formative variables (e.g., life history; background variables) and core needs (e.g., nine of these are specified by this model). As with other BEVI scales, from a life history perspective (Dunkel et al., 2012; Dunkel et al., 2011), note from the above correlation matrix data that Negative Life Events (NLE) is strongly and positively correlated (.66) with ID. What does NLE measure? From one perspective, NLE is akin to an intake interview that was built into the BEVI, and consists of the sorts of questions a clinician might ask a client during an initial interview. More specifically, such items address the client’s beliefs about her/his childhood, family, presence or absence of abuse or neglect, early development, schooling, relational history, and so forth. From a correlational standpoint at least, life history (as defined by NLE) clearly is strongly associated with
Identify Diffusion. In short, the greater the degree of life events reported to be “negative,” the more likely an individual is to report the sort of conflicted and confused sense of identity that appears to be encapsulated by Identity Diffusion.

As the EI Self specifies, the degree to which one’s core needs are experienced as acceptable and good by those in a position to do so (e.g., one’s caregivers) is directly related to the degree to which such core needs become internalized by the developing human being (i.e., core needs are experienced as integral rather than split off from the self) (Shealy, 1995; Shealy, Bhuyan, & Sternberger, in press). As noted above, the culmination of this internalization process for human beings is inextricably linked to the constellation of beliefs and values that are ultimately internalized and considered as part of one’s “version of reality” about self, other, and the world at large (Shealy, 2005, 2013). So how does the degree to which “core needs” are reported to have been met relate to one’s extent of Identity Diffusion? Although statistically differentiable from Identify Diffusion via exploratory factor analysis, Needs Closure on the BEVI is in fact highly correlated with Identify Diffusion (.84). At one level, this finding is not surprising given that Needs Closure (a powerful, primary factor extracted first on the basis of a Schmid-Leiman transformation, which essentially is a factor analysis of a factor analysis; see Schmid & Leiman, 1957) also taps into aspects of Negative Life Events (e.g., the experience of a bad or unhappy childhood). What is most interesting—and again congruent with Identify Diffusion—is that Needs Closure also includes odd explanations for why things are the way they are as well thought processes that might be described, from a clinical standpoint, as distorted if not disturbed. In short, the most fundamental observation here is that life history (e.g., beliefs regarding one’s childhood and family of
origin; the reported presence or absence of abuse or neglect; early development, schooling, and relational history) interacts with the degree to which core needs were believed to have been met, which further appears to be associated with the degree to which beliefs about self, others, and the world at large are closed, contradictory, and confused. Toward the larger goal of clarifying antecedents to identity development, future SEM research might consider whether perceived need satisfaction through the EI framework and related approaches, such as Self Determination Theory (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2001), mediates the linkage between life history and identity.

Congruent with the above findings, Waterman (1982) identified several interrelated variables that may influence the pathway of identity formation. First, the more an adolescent identifies with her/his parents during the period of identity formation, the greater the chance that meaningful and sustainable identity/life commitments will be enacted. However, if the experience of self, other, and the larger world between parent and child is too strongly linked (e.g., the experience of the child must resemble that of the parent)—or if autonomy and reflection in decision-making is limited (e.g., offspring are discouraged from thinking critically about what they do and why)—a foreclosed or diffuse identity may result. It is important to emphasize in this regard, however, that the development of identity foreclosure may in fact be the expectation for various ethnic and cultural groups around the world (Cheng & Berman, in press). More specifically, in Western cultures, permissive, neglecting, authoritarian, and authoritarian parenting styles (Baumrind, 1971) have been linked to identity formation in offspring. For example, more authoritative styles tend to support democratic decision-making in which perspectives are solicited and valued regardless of their relative status or power within a system, and the
active imagining of multiple perspectives regarding who one is and may become. In the Western world, such a parenting style is associated with a mature and stable sense of identity achievement when compared to individuals with permissive, neglecting, and/or rejecting parents (Berzonsky, 2004; Waterman, 1982). It is important to remember that not all cultural and ethnic groups around the world would necessarily value or promote such outcomes, and that other identities may in fact be more normative in different sociocultural contexts. For present purposes, the emphasis is more about how and why particular identities become established in the first place for human beings (e.g., what are the antecedent variables and processes that appear to impact identity development), rather than whether such outcomes are universally desirable. Even so, it seems plausible that Identity Diffusion, as operationalized above, may not be experienced as a “positive” outcome regardless of culture or context, although such an hypothesis remains an empirical question.

The above results also are consistent with literature suggesting that negative family dynamics, including conflicted attachment, poor communication, and low autonomy, all impact the healthy development of identity (Cummings et al., 2002; Shealy, 1995; Shealy, Bhuyan, & Sternberger, in press). Indeed, Erikson (1968) suggested that such family and parental characteristics were in fact associated with caregivers and offspring who experienced identity confusion. More specifically, Erikson maintained that parents who sought to project a façade of wealth, status, propriety, and happiness tended to minimize the experience or expression of honest feelings. For Erikson, such desires for approval and recognition also have been associated with jealousy, hypersensitivity, and criticism toward their children. The net effect of such
processes is impairment in the quality of children’s decision making, as well as the negation of authentic experiences and of expressions of emotions and needs by children. Along these lines, and more empirically grounded, Reis and Youniss (2004) found that poor communication between mothers and offspring was associated with regressed identity. Specifically, students who evidenced a regression in identity indicated disturbances in their communication with their mothers between 10th and 12th grade. Such relational disturbances included quarreling, becoming very angry, avoiding one another, and feeling that the one’s mother (or child) is disappointed in oneself. However, in cases where mother-adolescent communication improved, adolescents reported marked improvement in sharing their feelings with their mothers, accepting advice, being able to compromise, and feeling better after talking with their mothers.

Consistent with such findings, from the standpoint of the BEVI, Figure 1 indicates the strength of the relationship between Negative Life Events and Identity Diffusion by demonstrating that the greater the degree of Negative Life Events, the more likely individuals are to “strongly agree” with items that load statistically on Identity Diffusion (here, the y-axis is the score of Identity Diffusion, ranging from 1—4).
Figure 1. The Degree to which Negative Life Events on the BEVI is associated with a tendency to strongly agree to items loading on Identity Diffusion.

From an etiological perspective, a recurring theme in relation to the development of healthy identity is the relative degree to which autonomy, defined as the “promotion of volition” (Soensen et al., 2007) is encouraged in offspring. In a cross-cultural sense, Kagitzcibasi (2005) named the “autonomous-relational” self as a way to integrate both the desire for differentiation and the importance of being able to rely of others (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2001). For example, Smits et al. (2010) found that adolescents in predominantly Western societies who actively are encouraged to explore the validity of information provided to them about the nature of reality, and to critically appraise parental norms, subsequently develop stronger commitments, such as what to study, while also demonstrating a greater degree of subjectively experienced well-being. Of great importance is the validity to which these statements apply to adolescents outside of
the US, as the majority of samples to which these theories have been tested are from western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic societies (WEIRD) (Arnett, 2008; Henrich et al., 2010).

Life experiences outside of the immediate family—included as “formative variables” from the standpoint of the EI Self—also may mediate and moderate Identity Diffusion. For example, Duerden et al. (2009) examined the effects of a two-week adventure program on adolescent identity development. Overall, program participants experienced positive psychosocial growth across three of Erikson’s stages—industry, identity, and intimacy—as compared to a control groups. Moreover, relative to controls, program participants reported increased levels of informational processing, in which the rationale for decision-making is more actively evaluated and critiqued (Berzonsky, 1990, 1992). Program participants also reported reduced degrees of diffuse-avoidant processing, which is characterized by procrastination. A diffuse/avoidant style of decision making has been associated with a fragmented self-identity, which is loosely integrated and heavily dependent upon hedonic and situational cues and factors. In contrast, informational processing has been associated with a more coherent sense of self as well as healthy identity development (Berzonsky, 2008).

As further evidence that one’s perception of identity is affected not only by early family processes, but may be impacted by formative variables that are operative throughout the lifespan, Berman et al. (2008) found that clinically significant improvements in identity exploration and achievement—as well as significant declines in identity distress and foreclosure—could be facilitated by a program that emphasized active reflection on oneself and one’s aspirations. Along similar lines, Berman et al.
(2008) created a pilot-study to evaluate the feasibility of the Daytona Adult Identity Development Program designed to foster positive identity development in adults. During this program, participants became the “experts” through intentionally identifying their problems and engaging in activities to solve these problems. Importantly, group leaders and group participants were not informed as to what to do or how to solve their problems, but instead worked together to generate possible solutions; in doing so, participants were able to develop mastery, which was found to translate into empowerment and positive identity development. Overall, these results indicate that, as identity commitment increases, identity distress decreases, a finding, which has potential applied implications for individuals scoring high on Identity Diffusion.

Identity Diffusion and Tolerance of Disequilibrium

Now that we have considered both findings and associated literature that help to explain the etiology of Identity Diffusion, we focus our attention on the next level of organization from an Equilintegration perspective, which addresses the relative ability of individuals to tolerate the experience of disequilibrium (Shealy, 2004). On the BEVI, two scales—Basic Closedness and Hard Structure—address the putative capacity; both are correlated positively with Identity Diffusion (.62 and .42 respectively). Overall, this pattern suggests that, the higher an individual scores on Basic Closedness, the more likely he or she is to report feelings of insecurity, to have difficulty with introspection, to struggle to acknowledge basic emotional states, and to experience difficulty with decision-making. Items assessing Basic Closedness include “I am completely at peace,” “I never really feel sad,” “Life makes perfect sense to me,” and “I have no regrets,” items that deliberately tap a tendency toward social desirability, and has some consonance with the “Lie Scale”
on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) (Greene, 2010). In short, Basic Closedness appears to be associated with a tendency to dismiss emotional pain and/or identity confusion. The construct of Hard Structure taps into similar conceptual ground by assessing the degree to which individuals are overly settled on, and confident in, “who they are,” experience no regrets about their own life, and report that they seldom are caught “off guard.” Sample questions include, “I like myself exactly as I am,” “I don’t waver in what I think,” and “My motto is don’t worry be happy.”

From a clinical standpoint (see Chapters X and X), in order to apprehend who one is and what one may do with one’s life, it may be necessary to experience and work through sometimes unpleasant emotions as well as inherent paradoxes of life, and then move forward, better informed by these deep and complex aspects of human experience. As such, it should not be surprising that high scores on Basic Closeness and Hard Structure are highly correlated with high scores on Identity Diffusion. Extant literature supports these findings. For example, Waterman (2007) observes that a predilection toward self-reflection and consideration of alternative life paths is associated with identity achievement. The opposite tendencies (i.e., non-reflection and lack of consideration of alternatives) are associated with identity foreclosure and diffusion. At the same time, Waterman (2007) notes also that “identity foreclosure” may be associated with a subjective sense of well-being, if the identity that is foreclosed upon is both congruent with underlying talents (e.g., who one “really is”) as well as strongly sanctioned by individuals and a community that has great personal significance to the foreclosed individual. In other words, identity foreclosure should not always been seen as a “failing,” but could simply be the result of a match between who one is and how one
is valued within a particular life context. Again, in some cultural contexts, identity foreclosure is a valued identity strategy (Cheng & Berman, in press). Even so, identity diffusion is recognized to be a poorly integrated self-concept and conception of others, and, at the extreme version of identity diffusion, has been linked with psychological dysfunction and diagnoses, such as Borderline Personality Disorder (Kernberg & Clarkin, 1993). Although seemingly plausible, it remains an empirical question as to whether such mental health and emotional functioning outcomes are applicable in non-Western contexts.

Identity Diffusion and Critical Thinking

From an EI perspective, the category of Critical Thinking on the BEVI encompasses scales that address an individual’s tendency and capacity to hold complexity and derive attributions about self, others, and the larger world in a relatively sophisticated and nuanced manner. Of the scales in this category, Identity Diffusion is correlated (.42) with Divergent Determinism, which measures an individual’s tendency to prefer contrarian (e.g., arguing for the sake of arguing without genuine reflection or goal in mind) and non-reflective (e.g., no point in thinking about how things might have been) ways of relating to self, others, and the larger world. Examples of questions on this scale include, “You really can't say that one viewpoint is better than any other” and “What’s done is done so forgive and forget.” As may be clear, such statements essentially convey a sense that there is little point in thinking critically about competing perspectives or why events happen as they do. Not surprisingly, such a version of reality is likely to be associated with Identity Diffusion, since a predilection toward non-reflection about self, others, and
the larger world tends to be associated with a more diffuse sense of identity (Waterman, 2007).

Identity Diffusion and Access to Self, Other, and the Larger World

The three remaining categories on the BEVI refer to the ways in which individuals interact with and think about others, themselves, and the world at large. For example, Socioemotional Convergence (SEC) has a -.69 correlation with Identity Diffusion, meaning that individuals who are relatively high in Sociocultural Convergence tend to be relatively low in Identity Diffusion. As a factor, Socioemotional Convergence appears to measure an individual’s ability to hold complex and potentially contradictory juxtapositions such as the power of self-reliance with the recognition of personal vulnerability; patriotism and multicultural appreciation; self-examination and a “don’t look back” sensibility; as well as the ability to remain open to the recognition of personal shortcomings while maintaining a fierce determination to focus on what is positive. To capture the complex and seemingly contradictory nature of this construct, the scale includes items such as “We will eventually accept that men and women are simply different” and “I strongly support equal rights for women.” Individuals who are higher in Socioemotional Convergence apparently are able to see the potential validity in both items whereas those who score lower appear less inclined to do so.

Identity Diffusion also has a correlation of -.71 with Sociocultural Openness (SO), which indicates the level to which an individual holds liberal and progressive views and is accepting, culturally attuned, open, and globally oriented. Examples of questions from this scale include: “Homosexuals should have all the same rights as heterosexuals,” and “All of us would benefit if women had more economic and political power.”
Identity Diffusion is significantly and negatively correlated (-.63) with Emotional Attunement (EA), which refers to an individual’s capacity to be aware of and able to express emotions in a healthy and effective manner. Individuals who are very emotionally attuned are described as highly sensitive, highly social, needy, affiliative, undifferentiated, and comfortable with emotional expression. Examples of questions from this scale include: “I cry several times a year,” “My emotions can sometimes get the better of me,” and “I have real needs for warmth and affection.”

Identity Diffusion is correlated negatively (-.49) with Ecological Resonance (ER), which is associated with a tendency to be concerned about ecological matters, value the rights of all, and contend that spirituality exists in the natural world. Examples of questions from this scale include: “We should think of the earth as our mother,” and “I feel closer to God when I am in nature.”

Finally, Identity Diffusion is correlated moderately (.24) with Socioreligious Traditionalism (SR), which measures the tendency of individuals to hold conventional religious beliefs and consider themselves to be God-fearing. Sample items on this scale include “God’s words are good enough for me” and “Sometimes bad things happen because it’s God’s will.”

**Identity Diffusion as Cause and Effect**

It is one matter to demonstrate that there are strong and compelling relationships among Identity Diffusion and other aspects of psychological functioning, including those that are associated with the development of Identity Diffusion as well as predictive of particular outcomes (e.g., how Identity Diffusion leads to the expression of other socioaffective processes). Perhaps more important is attempting to identify causal pathways that
specify both the formative variables associated with a tendency toward Identity Diffusion as well as outcomes that are mediated by this construct. Towards such means and ends, we tested a series of Structural Equation Models (SEMs) to ascertain the extent of empirical support for our theoretical understanding of these associations. In Figures 2—6, we focus on five outcomes that are components of fundamental aspects of identity: marital status, educational aspirations, religious orientation, political orientation, and grade point average.

Figure 2. Structural equation model illustrating the relationship between formative variables, with Identity Diffusion as mediator, and marital status as outcome.
Figure 3. Structural equation model illustrating the relationship between formative variables, Identity Diffusion as mediator, and Republican affiliation as outcome.

Figure 4. Structural equation model illustrating the relationship between formative variables, Identity Diffusion as mediator, and Christian affiliation as outcome.
Figure 5. Structural equation model illustrating the relationship formative variables, Identity Diffusion as mediator, and educational aspiration as outcome.

Figure 6. Structural equation model illustrating the relationship between formative variables, Identity Diffusion as mediator, and GPA as outcome.
For purposes of interpretation, note that all five of these models fit the data adequately using standard fit indices (e.g., RMSEA, CFI), meaning that the covariance structure in the model approximates the covariance structure in the data. Within each of these models, “dashed” lines refer to relationships that are not significant (i.e., solid lines refer to significant relationships). Moreover, from a theoretical standpoint (and SEM basically allows for the empirical evaluation of theoretically derived models), each of these SEMs essentially is asking whether “Formative Variables” (e.g., life history, demographics) are predictive of “Mediators,” which from the standpoint of developmental psychopathology are “processes that account for the linkage between” Formative Variables and “Outcomes” (again, we focus here on four fundamental outcomes: marital status, political orientation, religious orientation, educational aspiration, and GPA) (cf., Cummings et al., 2000, pp. 131). So, how do we interpret these models?

First, a higher extent of Negative Life Events is positively predictive of Identity Diffusion whereas a higher degree of Positive Life Events is negatively predictive of Identity Diffusion across all five models. Moreover, the same patterns apply to three other Formative Variables across all five models: Ethnicity\(^3\), Disability, and Income. Specifically, being non-Caucasian, having a disability, and reporting lower income were significantly and positively predictive of higher Identity Diffusion. Second, Identity Diffusion also is predictive of these five outcomes. Specifically, a higher degree of Identity Diffusion was 1) positively predictive of being married; 2) negatively predictive

\(^3\) Ethnicity is dummy coded, with 0 = minority and 1 = Caucasian.
of being Republican; 3) negatively predictive of being Christian; 4) negatively predictive of higher education aspirations; and 5) negatively predictive of grade point average.

Assessment and Analysis

As discussed at the outset of this chapter, a high degree of Identity Diffusion is associated with a tendency to be “closed to” the ambiguity and disequilibrium that may accompany exposure to many interrelated aspects of existence, from one’s relationship to the emotional world of self and other, to a tendency to accept “gray” versus “black and white” vis-à-vis different cultures, to the relative inclination to care for and resonate with the “natural world.” So, Identity Diffusion essentially appears to be a measure of maladjustment, in that individuals who score highly on this scale tend to be less open or attuned to self, others, and the larger world, and less able to tolerate complexity. All of these findings are consistent with, and extend, data and theory from scholarship on the formation and nature of identity. For example, a diffused identity has been associated with uncertainty of self and an intolerance of ambiguity (Berzonsky et al., 1990; Marcia, 1966) as well as with relative difficulty analyzing and integrating information from multiple perspectives (Read et al., 1984). Additionally, individuals in a state of diffused identity may be experienced by others across a spectrum, from “careless or carefree, [and] charming” to “psychopathic, independent or schizoid” (Marcia, 1980, pp. 111).

So, how does such a perspective inform the above results? Let us consider first the correlation matrix data presented above. Using our initial results as a point of departure—demonstrating that a higher degree of Negative Life Events and Needs

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4 Christianity is a dummy variable. If a respondent claims his or her religious affiliation is Christian, then the value is 1.
5 On the background section of the BEVI, this question is worded as follows: “Please indicate the highest academic degree that you intend to obtain,” with response options ranging from no intention of pursuing a degree to the intention of securing a doctoral degree.
Closure are associated with a greater degree of Identity Diffusion—research on the ways individuals adapt to difficult life situations has been dominated by two classic traditions, focusing either on critical life events or on mechanisms of coping. Through such research, several forms of coping have become apparent: problem-focused coping in which individuals identify problems, seek support, and actively problem-solve; emotion-focused coping in which individuals appraise the situation, distance themselves, and seek comfort; and avoidant coping, where an individual uses distractions as a way of not dealing with the problem (Jopp & Schmitt, 2010; Carver & Conner-Smith, 2010). Two additional perspectives from the literature further clarify processes by which individual differences in coping strategies manifest themselves: access to resources and control beliefs (Moos & Holohan, 2003). Specifically, individuals with more resources—such as a greater degree of “physical health, finances, and [supportive] relationships with family members and friends” (Moos & Holohan, 2003, pp. 1393)—as well as greater internal control beliefs—defined as “mental schemas and have a specific role as they motivate actions, for example, by initiating or hindering the use of specific [coping] strategies” (Jopp & Schmitt, 2010, pp. 169)—were less likely to report having experienced negative life events. In addition, individuals who experienced more negative events reported greater use of coping strategies, which suggests that such formative variables are not destined to result in poorer life outcomes, but may culminate in resilience (Shiner & Masten, 2012; Cummings et al., 2002). The simultaneous consideration of resources, coping strategies, and control beliefs suggests that, in the context of handling critical life events, individuals who have more resources, more adaptive coping skills, and stronger control beliefs are better adept at dealing with these difficult situations compared to
individuals with fewer resources, less adaptive coping skills, and weaker control beliefs (Jopp & Schmitt, 2010).

From an Equilintegration perspective, and based on the correlation matrices presented above, a higher degree of Negative Life Events is associated with greater Identity Diffusion, which on the one hand begs the question of what types of “control beliefs” such individuals develop. The general point to be offered here is that a higher degree of exposure to Negative Life Events may well result in a greater array of control beliefs, but from the standpoint of the BEVI, such beliefs do not appear to be congruent with a higher degree of awareness or openness to self, to others, and to the larger world. Even so, exposure to learning experiences that are very different from those to which one is accustomed (e.g., study abroad), has been found in at least some instances to be associated with changes in how one experiences one’s own life history. For example, in one study in which the BEVI was administered twice, with at least 3 months between administrations during which a study abroad experience occurred, Negative Life Events, Needs Closure, and Identity Diffusion all decreased (by a factor of 24%, 30%, and 33% respectively). In other words, following the experience, scores for the group as a whole were less likely to be elevated on these scales (Baltsenperger et al., 2012), which suggests not only that one’s narrative about one’s self may change in a relatively short period of time, but that specific types of experiences may be associated with such changes.

Next, consider the implications of the structural equation models. First, recall that the mean age of this sample is 19. Thus, for these specific findings, it could be that individuals who have experienced a higher degree of specific formative variables—including most significantly, a lower degree of Positive Life Events as well as a non-
Caucasian status, lower parental income, and higher tendency to report being disabled—are that much more likely to demonstrate a high degree of Identity Diffusion, which may be a mediating factor in the associations between these predictors and marital status. It may be that such “formative variables” are predictive of a “premature marriage,” which theoretically at least, seems consistent with a “diffused identity” status (i.e., getting married because of external expectations or no particular direction or goals in sight). Importantly, it should be emphasized that factors such as one’s ethnic group, socioeconomic status, and education level can impact the decision or necessity to get married (Schneider, 2011). However, in more Western cultural contexts, research conducted on the relationship between identity development and marriage has indicated that marriage can be considered an “identity investment,” suggesting that individuals enter into marriage with a certain level of commitment or with a particular mindset (cf., Josselson, 1987; Helson, 1967; Pals, 1999).

Along these lines, four “prototypes” of marriage that correlate with the identity stages proposed by Marcia (1966) have been identified, which include anchored, defined, restricted, and confused (Josselson, 1987; Marcia, 1966). In a follow-up longitudinal study of adolescent young women originally interviewed by Helson (1967), Pals (1999) found that a more anchored identity in marriage mediated the link between ego resiliency and identity consolidation (i.e., the more secure women were in marriage, the more resilient they were in terms of consolidating their identity over time). Additionally, women with lower ego-resiliency were more likely to get married and, in turn, experienced higher self-doubt and identity uncertainty, which hindered overall healthy identity development. This research is congruent with the findings from the current
study, which suggest that individuals who have struggled too much or not at all may engage in premature marriage and, in turn, hinder their overall identity development. However, the engagement in premature marriage does not necessarily lead to permanent hindrance in identity development. Arnett (2011, 1998) found that individuals who marry early may miss the “emerging adult” experience but, in turn, develop a healthy sense of identity in relation to their new life status (i.e. as parents). Additionally, in a study by Arnett (1998) an inverse relationship between being married and engaging in “risk” behaviors was found. In this study, the majority of emerging adults who were married, and also indicated higher degrees of religiosity, engaged in less “risky” behavior than individuals who did not indicate religiosity. However, because other identity factors were not investigated, it cannot be concluded that individuals, who also experience identity diffusion, would have the same positive outcomes as Arnett’s (1998) sample. Although an empirical question, given the SEM pathways specified above, and the relationship of Identity Diffusion to other BEVI scales as illustrated by correlation matrix findings, such a marital “solution” to one’s historic difficulties appears to be non-optimal in terms of identity consolidation.

Interesting also is that a lower degree of Identity Diffusion appears to be associated with both Republicanism and a Christian orientation. Again, although hypothetical, given the mean age for this sample, on this specific BEVI scale, it could be that individuals who demonstrate a lower degree of ID are in fact less in conflict or turmoil about their focus or direction in life—and perhaps even subjectively “happier” (cf. Napier & Jost, 2008) —which theoretically could be associated with the assuredness that comes from these particular political and religious affiliations. Unlike their
counterparts within a college or university setting, such individuals may not be experiencing the degree of angst that seems to typify this specific population, in part because these aspects of identity already have been determined.

Finally, the fact that a higher degree of Identity Diffusion also is predictive of lower aspirations for higher education as well as lower academic performance as defined by GPA appears consistent with multiple findings in the literature. In particular, educational aspirations and performance would appear to be determined, at least in part, by the capacity to adapt to and cope with complexity, which is further associated with modification of extant identity structures (Berzonsky, 2011). Likewise, given that greater resources, coping skills, and control beliefs are associated with the ability to manage difficult life situations, it stands to reason that a higher degree of Identity Diffusion would be predictive of lower academic aspirations and performance, particularly in the context of higher education (Jopp & Schmitt, 2010).

Overall, the above results paint a clearer picture of what formative variables influence the level to which an individual may experience ID, what a ‘healthier’ identity may look like, as well as how ID relates to other aspects core to an individual’s sense of self. In short, if a young person is married, does not aspire as much as their peers to receive more education, and does not do as well in school, they are likely to report a higher degree of Identity Diffusion. Likewise, if they identify as a Republican or Christian, they also are likely to exhibit a lower degree of Identity Diffusion. Moreover, if the individual is non-White, disabled, and of low income, they also are more likely to exhibit a higher degree of Identity Diffusion. On the positive side, such assurance of identity suggests the relative absence of upset about who one is or where one is going vis-
à-vis these political and religious affiliations (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, & Rodriguez, 2009). In other words, it arguably is normative for young people to experience uncertainty, confusion, and the like, during the identity exploration phase, of this stage of life, which theoretically could be manifesting as a relatively high degree of Identity Diffusion on the BEVI, for individuals who have not embraced these political and religious statuses.

**In Conclusion**

On the basis of the above literature, results, and discussion, we offer three final observations that may be helpful in terms of future theory and research vis-à-vis identity in general and Identity Diffusion in particular. **First, in scholarly examinations of identity, we should focus upon questions of what and how.** More specifically, in addition to focusing on various categories or phases of identity structure or development (the what), it would be helpful to understand further how, and under what life circumstances, identity becomes codified as it does. Hopefully, the model and method presented here illustrate how both what and how objectives may simultaneously be pursued, through further operationalization of the Identity Diffusion construct as well as explication of the antecedents (e.g., life events) and concomitants (e.g., emotional access) that are association with its formation.

**Second, the definition of what we mean by a “healthy” or “developed” sense of identity should be explicated, empirically and theoretically.** In the present analysis, correlation matrix data are especially suitable to such objectives, by suggesting that a clear, healthy, and flexible sense of identity is associated with a higher degree of having one’s “core needs” met, both historically and currently (see also Soenens &
Vansteenkiste, 2011). Such an adaptive (e.g., open, aware) sense of identity also appears to be associated with a greater capacity to experience and express affect; greater interest in, and concern about, the natural world; greater ability to acknowledge feelings of weakness or insecurity; less of a tendency to be argumentative or disruptive for the sake of being so; and lesser tendencies towards traditionally religious ways of understanding self, others, and the larger world.

Third and finally, the construct of “identity” should be understood in relation to overarching and encompassing aspects of self. As indicated throughout this chapter, identity is a complex and multifaceted construct that becomes uniquely organized for each human being while following specific determined pathways that are integral to the human condition. In other words, the experience of specific formative variables will impact how one’s identity becomes structured, even though such processes are mediated by each individual’s adaptive potential and unique formative variables, such as culture and context (Shealy, 2004); the resulting experience of self is associated with the version of reality of self” that we present to ourselves and others (Erikson, 1950; Shealy, 2005). From an Equilintegration perspective, such verbalized content about identity manifests as belief statements, which culminate from an interaction between formative variables (e.g., life history) (Dunkel et al., 2012) and core needs (e.g., attachment, affiliation) (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2011). In short, identity, as the self’s narrative about itself, is productively understood as a verbal representation of the individual’s beliefs about self to self, others, and the larger world, which manifests at any moment in time as the most recent culmination of a complex interaction between core needs and formative variables (Shealy, 2013). Hopefully, these findings illustrate that the EI model and BEVI method
are well suited to help us understand further the fascinating processes by which we
humans come to tell a story about ourselves—to ourselves, others, and the larger world—
regarding what and why we are who we are.
Appendix A

Annotated Bibliography


This article attempts to clarify the conceptual and methodological ambiguities around the concept of perceived behavioral control. The researcher found that perceived control over performance of a behavior, which is comprised of beliefs about self-efficacy and controllability, can be thought of as a unitary latent variable. Additionally, the authors argue that no necessary correspondence between self-efficacy and internal control factors or controllability and external control factors. The current research references perceived behavior control and the theory of planned behavior in relation to how adolescence perceive control over their life decision to cope and adapt with difficult life situations.


This book chapter describes the theory of planned behavior. According to the theory, the intention of the immediate antecedent behavior is a function of the attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. The chapter discusses empirical support for the theory based upon numerous correlational studies that demonstrates the theories ability to predict intentions and behavior, as well as from
interventions show changes that in behavioral, normative and control beliefs can produce in intentions and how these changes are reflected in subsequent behavior. In reference to the current research, the theory of planned behavior and adolescent perceived self-control is addressed in relation to the ways in which adolescence approach and modify their behavior to adapt and cope with difficult life situations.


This article examined family role transitions (such as marriage and parenthood) in relation to risk taking behavior (risky driving, substance use and risky sexual behavior). The researchers found that being married and having one, or more, children tended to be inversely related to self-reported participation in risk behavior. This relationship seemed to be mediated by sensation seeking and religiosity, such that individuals who were low in sensation seeking and high in religiosity were more likely to be married and have children. The article was used in the current research as support for the idea that although emerging adults may marry young, this does not mean they engage in unhealthy behavior or remain in an “unhealthy” or “less developed” identity status (such as identity diffusion). In fact, individuals who marry young may, actually reduce their risk taking behavior and develop a new “healthy” sense of identity as a spouse or parent.
This article discusses the influence globalization has on psychological functioning. The psychological consequences, focuses on identity issues, is described such that most individuals worldwide now develop bicultural identities, combining their local identity with the global culture. This development of multiple identities is thought to be a contributing factor in the increase of young people who experience identity confusion, specifically in non-Western cultures, such that the period of emerging adulthood is observed to extend identity exploration through the mid-to late twenties. The current research references the influence globalization has on identity development in emerging adults and the possible implications globalization has on emerging adults remaining in a state of identity diffusion.


This chapter discusses the period of life (age 18–25), named emerging adulthood, and the various influences leading to the rise of this new life stage. Factors such as: economic changes leading to the need to attain higher levels of education and training, scientific advances such as birth control and social changes like the increased acceptance of premarital sexuality, cohabitation and overall changes in the traditional beliefs of marriage. Additionally, the processes of socialization, individualization, the role of
family, peers, school and work are all discussed in relation to life stage emerging adulthood. The current research discusses the implications the stage of emerging adulthood has on overall identity development, names identity foreclosure and identity diffusion and the ways in which various life experiences my influence the experience of a “troubled” emergence of adulthood.


This article proposes the idea that psychological research published in APA journals focuses too much on the American population, which comprises less than 5% of the world’s population. The author did an analysis of articles published in six APA journals and demonstrated that the contributors, samples and editorial leadership of the journals is predominantly American. Next, the author showed that a demographic profile of the human population demonstrates the majority of the world’s population lives in conditions very different from those of Americans, which creates doubt in relation to how well American psychological research can be said to represent humanity. This article was referenced in the current research in order to acknowledge the disparities in psychological research and the representation it can have of the overall world’s population.

Additionally, the current research attempts to make statements that represent cultures outside of America and in doing so, the need to qualify and broaden the research to extend beyond the American college student sample is included.

This chapter further discusses the proposed life stage, emerging adulthood, by proposing and discussing five features of emerging adulthood based on hundreds of Americans, aged 18–29, from diverse ethnic groups and social classes. Research conducted in a wide range of cultures, including: Asian, North and South America and Europe has added to the understanding of cultural variations in development during emerging adulthood. However, the author acknowledges how understanding the cultural basis of identity development requires more than cross-cultural comparisons, such that cultural beliefs of normative patterns of behavior may be the important and necessary foundation for understanding these developmental differences across cultures. The current research references this chapter in order to understand more deeply how the BEVI findings may apply to cultures outside of the US and how the differences observed in BEVI scales may be due to cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic differences amongst the sample. Importantly, the differences in development across cultures in acknowledged in the current research and the limited ability to generalize findings to cultures outside of the US is acknowledged.


This article attempts to examine the relationship between Marcia’s ego identity statuses, attachment and intimacy. The authors conducted a meta-analysis of studies between 1966 and 2005 and found weak to moderate correlations between attachment styles and the identity statuses. However, it was found that the mean proportion of secure attachment was higher for identity achieved when compared with foreclosures and diffusions. Additionally, it was found that identity and the intimacy status had a positive association. This article was referenced in the current research to demonstrate how individuals with “less developed” or “unhealthy” identity development (foreclosure and diffusion) also experience less developed attached and poorer intimacy outcomes when compared with their identity achieved peers.


This article conducted preliminary evaluation of the feasibility of extending the use of intervention-based strategies for positive youth development to an adult university-based population. The intervention change strategies were co-participatory and transformative and aimed at increasing healthy identity development. The researchers found that students enrolled in an elective personal growth psychology course experienced an
increase in identity exploration and as commitment making increased, identity distress decreased. Additionally, an increased in the identity achieved status and decrease identity foreclosure status was observed amongst individuals participating in the course. This article was referenced in the current research to support the idea that making identity commitments helps reduce identity distress and further emphasizes the potential psychosocial harm in remaining in an identity diffuse state. Additionally, the article suggested that when individuals were encouraged to think for themselves to overcome “problems” they felt empowered and in turn, experienced more positive identity changes.


This article examined the role cognitive competence has in the processes involved in identity formation. Participants (215 university students aged 18 – 25) completed various questionnaires regarding identity style, critical problem solving, politics, religion, occupation and values. From these questionnaires, participants were categories into four groups: achievement for high on exploration and commitment, moratorium for high on exploration and low on commitment, foreclosed for high on commitment and low on exploration and diffused for low on exploration and commitment. It was found that cognitive competence exerted small, but significant, effect on the variation in the formation of identity. This article was referenced in the current research as support for the role decision-making and cognitive components have on identity development.

This article aimed to examine the experience of existential anxiety in adolescents. Existential anxiety is thought to be a core human issue and has been discussed in theoretical and philosophical writings; however, little is known about how these concerns emerge and influence emotional functioning of adolescents. 130 adolescents in grades 9 – 12 participated and it was found that existential anxiety exists among adolescents and is associated with psychological symptoms and identity issues. This article was referenced in the current research to further support the role identity issues have on overall psychological functioning, specifically in terms of adolescent experiences of anxiety.


This chapter discusses a model of identity formation that focuses on the process through which self-relevant experiences and information are encoded and processed. The process is names a social-cognitive strategy that contributes to problem solving and decision making and proposes that interindividual differences in processing style influence the way in which self-identity is structured and revised. The theory is grounded in constructivist assumptions of self-identity and it is thought that people construct both a sense of who they think they are and the reality in which they operate. This chapter is
referenced as support for how individuals develop their sense of identity and the role beliefs, values and sense of self contribute to how identity is formed. Additionally, this chapter highlights the role information processing plays in decision-making and how we adjust and adapt to life situations and problems.

Berzonsky, M. (2003). Identity style and well-being: Does commitment matter? *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, Vol. 3(2), 131–142. This article explores the way that identity processing styles and identity commitments influence personal well-being. Berzonsky (2003) argues that the research on identity commitment is, in its’ own right, an important facet of the relationship between identity processing styles and outcome variables. The current research references this article to further support the finding that the way in which an individual approached identity development, their identity processing style, influences their overall approach to identity commitment making and their everyday functioning.

Berzonsky, M. (2004). Identity style, parental authority, and identity commitment. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Vol. 33(3), 213–220. This article investigates the role that parental authority and social-cognitive identity styles play in establishing identity commitments. The author found that family authority and identity styles accounted for 50% of the variation in the strength of the identity commitments made and that the relationship was mediated by identity style. The current research references Berzonsky (2004) to support the finding that more authoritative parenting styles may negatively influence child identity development.

This article examined the role that rational and automatic cognitive processes and identity processing styles play in identity formation. The author found that the relationship between rational processing and identity commitment, as well as identity achievement, was mediated by an informational identity style. An automatic/intuitive processing style was associated with identity achievement and was mediated by a normative identity style. The current research references this article to further emphasize the importance of identity processing styles and the cognitive factors that influence identity development. Importantly, the current research argues that individuals who remain in the diffuse identity status use a diffuse/avoidant processing style, which is often represented by a fragmented sense of self.


This book chapter examines how identity forms in terms of a social-cognitive model. Identity is conceptualized as a cognitive structure, or self-theory, that provides a point of reference for interpreting information, solving problems and making decisions. Three identity-processing styles are discussed: informational, normative and diffuse-avoidant. The informational styles are observed to be skeptical of their own self-view and
intentionally seek out and utilize identity-relevant information to personally resolve identity conflicts. Individuals with a normative style more automatically adopt a sense of identity by internalizing standards and values of significant others. Lastly, individuals with a diffuse-avoidant style are seen as reluctant to confront identity conflicts and procrastinate as long as possible. The author references significant empirical evidence on the identity-processing styles and includes links between identity style and numerous identity and cognitive changes. Factors that may influence individual differences in identity styles include: gender, culture, parental processes and personality traits. This chapter is referenced in the current research to provide support and evidence as to the various ways identity develops and the various consequences of the different identity statuses and identity styles.

Berzonsky, M., Cieciuch, J., Duriez, B. & Soenens, B. (2011). The how and what of identity formation: Associations between identity styles and value orientations. *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 50(2), 295–299. This article investigated the hypothesis that identity-processing styles are systematically associated with Schwartz’s (1992) value orientations. It was found that the informational identity style was positively associated with values emphasizing independence that transcended selfish interest. A normative style was positively associated with values like security and traditionalism, whereas a diffuse-avoidant style was associated with values highlighting self-interest, like hedonism and power. The current research referenced this article to support the finding that individuals in a diffuse identity status and the way in which they make meaning of their life situations.

This article investigated the relationship between the identity statuses and the structural dimensions of self-theories. Undergraduate students were grouped according to the four identity statuses and also completed a role construct repertory test. It was found that Moratoriums and Diffusions had the highest self-construct differentiation, whereas Achievers were most self-certain in their ratings (Diffusions the least). This article was used in the current research to support the finding that the identity diffuse status has the least developed construct of self and in turn, a more fragmented sense of identity than other identity statuses.


This article investigated whether ego development in middle adolescence predicts intimacy in emerging adulthood and whether identity achievement at the transition to adulthood mediates the link to intimacy. The study found that a direct link between early ego development, at age 15, and intimacy in romantic relationships at age 25. There were no paths form earlier intimacy to later ego development found in the current study. The mediating factor between earlier ego development and later intimacy was relational identity (an integrative identity construct measured at age 24). The study reportedly confirms Erikson’s old ideas on the developmental ordering of identity and intimacy. The
results of this study were referenced in the current research to support the idea that identity development in emerging adulthood influences intimacy and vice versa.


This book discusses ideas concerning the development of self and identity and the individual emotional development and processes that influence development of identity. From an emotional and dynamic standpoint the authors offer a difference perspective of how identity develops as a self-organizing process. This book is referenced in the current research to support the idea that in Western societies identity is formed with a great deal of potential values and beliefs from which to choose, whereas young people in hierarchically structured societies are more likely to be expected to internalize values and beliefs from family members or other elders.


This article discusses how individual personality factors influences coping styles. The five-factor model of traits was explored via meta-analysis and links between different coping styles and traits were observed. Engagement in coping was linked with optimism, extraversion, conscientiousness and openness, whereas more disengagement was linked to neuroticism. Numerous moderators were identified, including: age, stressor severity and temporal proximity between the stressor and the coping report. Importantly, personality and coping style played both independent and interactive roles influencing
both physical and mental health. The current research referenced this article to further support how personality factors, and in turn identity styles, may influence the ways in which an individual engages, or disengages, in coping.


This book chapter, in press, discusses the unique experiences of adolescents and emerging adults who grew up in globalized China and how this experience influenced their sense of self. The impact globalization has on identity development is further explored, specifically in the context of socio-historical China. Importantly, the authors review psychological literature and research conducted on Chinese and Chinese-American populations and the applicability of Western concepts of identity on a culture does may – or may not – have the same values. The current research references this chapter in order to provide evidence and support for the differences and similarities of identity development in Western and non-Western cultural contexts. Importantly, concepts of identity diffusion and identity foreclosure are discussed in detail and the way in which identity commitment may occur in similar ways but identity exploration appears to be experienced differently in various cultural climates.

This book discusses the relation of identity formation to human striving, agency, and organization, culture. The authors focus on pragmatic issues of identity, such as postmodernism and feminism, as well as placing identity formation in a cultural and historical context as matched with the original work of Erik Erikson. The book expands on Erikson’s theories and ideas to attempt to make them more relevant and applicable to today’s society. The current research references this book in order to expand on the overall understanding of identity development form a cultural context and standpoint.


This article draws upon three identity processes, commitment, in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment, to empirically derive identity statuses in a sample of early and middle adolescents. The authors identified five statuses: achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, searching moratorium and diffusion and specifically, found the intra-status that differentiated moratorium. The differentiation helped clarify the positive and negative aspects of moratorium and meaningfully distinguishes numerous variables, such as: personal features, psychosocial problems and parental relationships. The authors conclude that a valid distinction in identity statuses can be made in early to middle adolescence and also the role age and ethnic background plays in distinguishing identity status.

This article examines the assumptions that underlie the consistency perspective in social and personality psychology. These underlying assumptions are identified as based on independent and individualistic views of the self. Importantly, the authors discuss how a relation or interdependence view of self may consider consistency less important for social behavior and well-being. The findings suggest that for an individual with a highly relational self-construct, the relationship between consistency and well-being is weaker than for individuals with a low relational self-construct. The authors argue the importance of analyzing theories of self and personality from a cross-cultural standpoint. The current research integrates this article to support the importance of cross-cultural perspectives on identity development.


This book focuses on the primary context in which children develop – the family – and investigates the connections between biological, psychological and social processes that influence adaptation and development. The book further explores a process-orientated frame for understanding development and the onset of disordered behavior. The current research references this book in order to emphasize the influence that negative family dynamics, including conflicted attachment, poor communication, and low autonomy,
have on the impact the healthy development of identity. Furthermore, the article supports
the finding that individuals who experienced more negative events reported greater use of
coping strategies, which suggests that such formative variables do not have to lead to
poorer life outcomes, but may culminate in resilience

A.W. Kruglanski, & E.T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of Theories of Social

This chapter discusses Self-Determination Theory, an empirically derived theory of
motivation and personality in a social context. This theory differentiates motivation in
terms of being autonomous or controlled. The theory consists of five “mini-theories”
that address different issues: effects of social environment on intrinsic motivation;
development of autonomous extrinsic motivation and self-regulation through
internalization and integration; individual differences in general motivational
orientations; functioning of fundamental universal psychological needs essential for
growth, integrity and wellness; and the effects of difference goal contents on well-being
and performance. The current research references this chapter in order to support how the
EI Self illustrates how the interaction between our core needs (e.g., for attachment,
affiliation) and formative variables (e.g., caregiver, culture) results in beliefs and values
about self, others, and the world at large that individuals internalize over the course of
development and across the life span.


This article revises the hedonic treadmill model in response to recent empirical work. The hedonic treadmill model, theorizing that good and bad events may temporarily affect happiness but individuals quickly adapt back to “hedonic neutrality.” Based on recent empirical work, five revisions were proposed: individuals’ set points are not hedonically neutral; people have different set points which are partially dependent on their temperaments; an individual may have multiple happiness set points; different components of well-being can move in difference directions; well-being points can change under some conditions; and individuals differ in their adaptation to events. This article was referenced in the current research in order to support the relationship between Identity Diffusion and the constructs from the BEVI. This finding helps illuminate how and why individuals interpret experiences and negotiate the meaning and purpose of their lives (e.g., Erikson, 1968) including, but not limited to, self-evaluation, self-esteem, life satisfaction, life purpose, personal meaning, and eudaimonic well-being.


This article examined the impact of an adventure recreation program on adolescent identity development. Participants (aged 11 to 15) were divided into a participation group
and a comparison group. Participants in the program completed a two-week adventure program that included: backpacking, mountain biking, and white-water rafting, amongst other activities. The authors used the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory to measure levels of identity and the Identity Style Inventory to assess informational, normative and diffuse/avoidant approaches to identity formation. The authors found that program participants experienced significant positive identity development when compared to the control group. The current research references this article to support the role intervention programs have on reducing the degree of diffuse-avoidant processing, which is characterized by procrastination. Additionally, the article supports the current research findings that a diffuse/avoidant style of decision making has been associated with a fragmented self-identity, which is loosely integrated and heavily dependent upon hedonic and situational cues and factors. In contrast, informational processing has been associated with a more coherent sense of self as well as healthy identity development.

Dunkel, C., Kim, J., & Papini, D. (2012). The general factor of psychosocial development and its relation to the general factor of personality and life history strategy. *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 52(2), 202–206. This article examined the Eriksonian psychosocial stages form a single variable, or “General Factor of Psychosocial Development” (GFPD). It is speculated that this factor is associated with the General Factor of Personality (GFP) and Life History (LF) such that these variables form a higher order “Super-K” factor. The authors found that correlation and confirmatory factor analyses supported the GFPD. Additionally, it was found that these three variables form a single “Super-K” factor. The authors argue that these results
remain as-is after controlling for socially desirable response bias. The current research references this article in order to support the results of the BEVI data that Negative Life Events (NLE) is strongly and positively correlated (.66) with ID. The current research attempts to identify NLE as akin to an intake interview that is built into the BEVI, and consists of the sorts of questions a clinician might ask a client during an initial interview. More specifically, such items address the client’s beliefs about her/his childhood, family, presence or absence of abuse or neglect, early development, schooling, relational history, and so forth.


This article attempts to further explore the various measures of identity that would load onto a single factor, making a “Super-K” factor, variables such as: life history strategy and psychological well-being. A sample of 248 university students completed questionnaires related to identity, life history strategy and psychological well-being. The current research applies the findings of this article to support the construct Negative Life Events (NLE) as akin to an intake interview that is built into the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI), and consists of the sorts of questions a clinician might ask a client during an initial interview. More specifically, such items address the client’s beliefs about her/his childhood, family, presence or absence of abuse or neglect, early development, schooling, relational history, and so forth.

This article discusses how hope and psychological stress are related and share formal properties. For example, hope and stress is thought to be: contextual, meaning-based, dynamic and affect well-being. The author bases their argument on two assumptions, that hope is essential for individuals who are coping with serious psychological and stress and that hope is not a perpetually self-renewing resource. Furthermore, the relationship between hope and coping is thought to be dynamic and reciprocal, such that each supports the other. The author found this relationship to be observed when two adaptive tasks threaten physical or psychological well-being, like managing uncertainty and coping with change. This article discusses how coping can foster hope and vice-versa. This article is referenced in the current research in order to support the finding that individuals who report a more coherent sense of identity use more proactive coping strategies and adapt more successfully to difficult life situations.


This article compared college seniors, considered creative by their faculty, with their classmates as a group and a subgroup and seniors comparable in scholastic aptitude and major, at a women’s’ college. Participants were followed-up five years after graduation and information was obtained from their parents and spouses. The author found that the salient personality characteristics of the “creative” women were the same found in creative men, such as: symbolic interests, need for autonomy and high aspirations. The
authors then discussed how these characteristics from childhood to young adulthood are continued and how they effect the lives of these young women, such as identity, marriage commitments and career. This article is referenced in the current research to support the finding that, in more Western cultural contexts, that the relationship between identity development and marriage has indicated that marriage can be considered an “identity investment,” suggesting that individuals enter into marriage with a certain level of commitment or with a particular mindset.


This article discusses how behavioral scientific research generally draw from samples of participants from Western, Education, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) societies and then attempt to make broad claims about human psychology. The current article explores extensive data from across the behavioral science research to investigate whether variability does exists across populations, or whether these “WEIRD” samples can be compared with the rest of the human population. The domains that were explored include: visual perception, fairness, cooperation, spatial reasoning, self-concept, and heritability of IQ, among others. The authors found that members of “WEIRD” societies are among the least representative of the general human population. The author argues that the empirical patterns found in this analysis of data suggest that such generalizations about humanity need to be re-considered. The current research draws upon this article to support that consideration of identity issues from multiple cultural standpoints.

Importantly, the current research draws from a predominantly Western college sample
and therefore, consideration and cautiousness is taken when making broad statements about identity development and antecedent variables of development.


This article examines the effects that basic resources (i.e. sociodemographics, cognition, health and social) have on coping (assimilative and accommodative) and control beliefs (internal control), as well as how they interplay in the event of negative life situations. 420 middle-aged participants completed two measurements over four years. The authors found that participants averaged six negative events in the four-year period between measurements and that a positive relationship was found between resources and control beliefs, coping and well-being. Additionally, the amount of resources an individual reported was related to fewer negative events experienced later on. The results also showed that the effect of resources on well-being was mediated by assimilative coping and that individuals with assimilative coping also demonstrated higher internal control beliefs. The current research references this article to support the idea that given that greater resources, coping skills, and control beliefs are associated with the ability to manage difficult life situations, it stands to reason that a higher degree of Identity Diffusion would be predictive of lower academic aspirations and performance, particularly in the context of higher education. Additionally, this article provided evidence that individuals in the identity diffuse status may use more avoidant coping, where an individual uses distractions as a way of not dealing with the problem.

This book presents the first study that examines how women develop their individual identities. The author engages in an experimental approach to study women from a longitudinal standpoint. The study provides support for the ways in which women differ, from both men and each other, in domains such as: relationship formation, decision making about family and children, career pursuits, religious beliefs and world views. The current research references Josselson (1987) as support for the reasons behind decisions, such as who and when to marry, as well as whether to have children or not. Additionally, the current research draws upon this research to support the types of marriage (anchored, defined, restricted and confused) and the potential identity statuses that relate to each of this marriage types.


This article describes the way in which autonomy and agency are used interchangeably and whether this is an accurate use of these terms. The author argues that this interchange is used in predominantly Euro-American cultures that reference ideologies of individualism. This article explores how the self-constructs underpinning autonomy include the dimensions of agency and interpersonal distance. Although autonomy and relatedness are viewed as conflicting in many cultures, the current article argues they can be compatible and may help researchers better understand the similarities and differences
in various cultural contexts in the development of self and identity. The current research references this article to support how identity development in various cultures develops such that in many collectivist cultures, the “autonomous-relational” self is named as a way to integrate both the desire for differentiation and the importance of being able to rely on others.


This chapter discusses the authors’ treatment, based in psychodynamic theory, adapted for the specific needs of patients diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. The authors discuss the theory of pathology, theory of psychodynamic treatment and the various strategies of the treatment. The current research refers to this chapter for support and further emphasize the potential pathological nature of adolescents remaining in an identity diffuse status into emerging adulthood and beyond. This book chapter discusses how individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder are often characterized as having a diffuse identity that is reflective of a poorly integrated sense of self. The current research draws upon this literature as support for the findings of a poorly integrated self, along with higher levels of internalizing and externalizing symptoms of psychological distress as compared with identity achieved peers.

This article examines whether verbal defenses, such as rationalizations and/or distortions, differ according to an individuals’ self-esteem level. The authors found that if an individuals’ self-esteem was stable, they exhibited low levels of verbal defensiveness; however, if an individuals’ self-esteem was contingent on whether it was high or low, they engaged in higher levels of verbal defensiveness than their stable self-esteem peers. The authors then discuss how well-anchored and secure self-esteem may decrease an individuals’ need to enhance or bolster feelings of self-worth. The current research references this article in order to demonstrate how an individual’s self-esteem and self-evaluations influence the way in which their personal identity develops.


This article examined the impact of interpersonal relationships and discrepant feedback on adolescents’ exploration of career, marital and parental future identities. Undergraduate students, with a mean age of 20, along with “dating” friend completed questionnaires concerning their relationship. The authors found that discrepant feedback about identity produced identity instability in the participants. Furthermore, the behavior of the partners increased the likelihood that participants would explore their anticipated career, marriage and parenthood roles. This article was referenced in the current research.
to support the idea that the information and feedback we get from significant others influences our identity development and that the relationships we engage in during emerging adolescence can play a significant role in determining our later identity formation.


This book chapter discusses the origins and development of the identity statuses, providing an overview of studies into the antecedents and implications of the identity construct. The chapter includes reviews of variables, such as personality, relationships, behaviors and development that have been examined in relation to identity over the past 45 years. The current research references this chapter to better understand the different metatheoretical approaches to identity have been introduced – including identity status. Additionally, this chapter explores the developmental antecedents and consequences of the identity diffuse status and supports the current research notion that unlike the achieved and foreclosed statuses, adolescents in the identity diffusion status are marked by making no commitments and having an undefined sense of self.

This article identifies four identity dimensions (commitment making, identification with commitment, exploration in depth and exploration in breadth) that were used to derive identity statuses in a sample of late adolescents. Through cluster analysis, five were retained and four closely resembled Marcia (1966) identity statuses, namely: Achievement, Moratorium, Foreclosure and Diffused Diffusion. The authors found that adolescents in the fifth cluster, Carefree Diffusion, scored low-moderate on commitment and low on exploration. The current research draws upon this article to support the distinction of identity diffusion and the rationale behind the BEVI scale defined as Identity Diffusion.


This article explored how college students’ internalized and evolving life story (narrative identity) represents an integral feature of their personality. It was thought that if this is true, then their narrative identity should manifest continuity over time, as well as providing evidence regarding important personality changes. The authors had college freshmen and seniors write detailed accounts of 10 key scenes in their life story. The
participants then repeated this procedure 3 months and then 3 years later. The results showed a substantial continuity over time for narrative complexity and positive emotional tone and themes of agency and growth. Also, emerging adults were found to construct more emotionally positive stories and showed greater levels of emotional nuances and self-differentiation, as well as great understanding of their own personal development in the 4th year of study compared with the 1st. This article was referenced in the current research to better understand the unique narrative component of identity development.


This book describes the research and theory behind the stories we create and how these influence and shape our identities. This volume addresses questions of unity and multiplicity in our life stories, the controversy over individual versus society influence of our stories and the extent to which these stories show stability or growth in the narrator. The authors use detailed examination of excerpts from stories told to the researchers as well as published memories in order to better understand how our narrative identities become the stories we live by. This book was referenced in the current research to better understand and define how our narrations, or stories, influence our identity development.

This article explored the possible reactions and responses to the late adolescent stage of identity crisis. The author set forth criteria for inclusion in 1 of 4 identity statuses, namely the presence of crisis and commitment in the areas of occupation and ideology. 86 college males engaged in and were categorized into identity statuses according to their performance on stressful concept-attainment tasks, patterns of goal setting and vulnerability to self-esteem. Participants with higher ego identity performed better on the concept-attainment task, whereas individuals who were characterized by adherence to parental wishes and set unrealistically high goals were in the lower ego identity statuses. This article was referenced in the current research to better understand the research and underpinnings of the four identity statuses: diffusion, moratorium, foreclosure and achieved. Additionally, this article further explains Erikson’s (1950) lifespan theory of identity development inspired the identity status approach– which in turn has stimulated a number of more specific models referring to the development of personal goals, values, and beliefs.


This article examined the developmental hypothesis of the identity status model that states as adolescents get older, they undergo progressive development shifts in identity status. Through review of research, the author found that although progressive
development trends were found, they usually involved trends in either a higher or lower status and few involved systematic progressive development trends. Additionally, the author found it was easier to find PDTs with separate measures of commitment and exploration rather than with classifications of identity statuses. Along with PDTs, the author explored relational identity research, finding that PDTs were found for relational identity among the higher and lower identity statuses. For example, high commitment showed the highest level of psychological well-being, whereas diffusion and moratoriums were the least happy. This article was referenced in the current research to support the idea that individuals in the Achieved and Foreclosed statuses tend to report lower levels of depressive symptoms, anxiety, substance use, and aggression.


This study explored identity development in 923 early-to-middle adolescent and middle-to-late adolescents. It was found that identity progression occurred in the following way: the number of diffusions, moratoriums and searching moratoriums (an emerging status) decreased, but the representation of high-committed statuses increased. The high-committed statuses were re-defined as: variants of a [fore]closed identity – early closure and closure; and achieved. Additionally, identity progression was noted by seven transitions: diffusion → moratorium, diffusion → early closure, moratorium → closure, moratorium → achievement, searching moratorium → closure, searching moratorium →
achievement, and early closure → achievement. This article was referenced in the current research to explain how the term “early closure” can refer to foreclosure among early adolescents. Furthermore, this article supports the idea that foreclosure may be adaptive in many cases, and it does not necessarily represent having defaulted on the identity development process.


This article explores dispositional and contextual perspectives on coping and describes various domains of coping styles and skills. The authors present a conceptual framework that integrates aspects of these constructs and uses this as a guide to select reviews of links between personal and social resources, coping skills and adaptive functioning. This article is referenced in the current research to further understand two additional perspectives from the literature that further clarify processes by which individual differences in coping strategies manifest themselves: access to resources and control beliefs. This article also supports the finding that individuals with more resources – such as a greater degree of “physical health, finances, and [supportive] relationships with family members and friends” were less likely to report having experienced negative life events.


This article explores the notion that conservative ideology is a palliative function to explain why conservatives are happier than liberals. The authors draw on the system-justification theory to demonstrate that a right-wing, versus left-wing orientation, is associated with greater subjective well-being and that this relationship is mediated by the rationalization of inequality. Three studies were examined, using nationally representative data from the U.S. and nine additional countries. The authors also found that an increase in economic inequality from 1974 – 2004 exacerbated the happiness gap between liberals and conservatives, referring to the idea that because conservatives, more than liberals, posses an ideological buffer against the negative effects of the economic inequality. The current research references this article to support the finding that a lower degree of Identity Diffusion appears to be associated with both Republicanism and a Christian orientation. Again, although hypothetical, given the mean age for this sample, on this specific BEVI scale, it could be that individuals who demonstrate a lower degree of ID are in fact less in conflict or turmoil about their focus or direction in life – and perhaps even subjectively “happier”– which theoretically could be associated with the assuredness that comes from these particular political and religious affiliations. Unlike their counterparts within a college or university setting, such individuals may not be experiencing the degree of angst that seems to typify this specific population, in part because these aspects of identity already have been determined.

This chapter reviews the possible positive and negative identities that an individual may hold. In particular, the chapter examines the implications the possible identities may have for identity-based motivation and the pursuit of identity-based goals. Importantly, possible identities are important as they provide motivation for future goals and an interpretive standpoint to make sense of experiences; however, as the chapter describes, little is known about how and under what circumstances these possible identities form and occur. This chapter explores these circumstances and finds that identities differ with life phase, transition and circumstances. Also, identities can affect well-being and are sometimes implicated and referenced in current action. This chapter addresses the importance of understanding possible identities as if the future identity is congruent to the current self, then the way in which situations are encountered and made sense of in relation to the importance and possibility of the future identity, rather than impossible, they are more likely to persist in the pursuit of this future identity. The current research references this chapter in order to emphasize the way in which the potential of our future identity influences how we respond and react to current situations and either pursue or retreat from situations.

Identity consolidation during early adulthood was conceptualized as a process of investing oneself in new adult roles, responsibilities, and contexts and evaluating one's ongoing experience in order to construct a coherent, grounded, and positive identity. The current study longitudinally examined (age 21 to age 27) the roles of ego-resiliency, an important personality resource, and marriage, an important identity context, in the process of identity consolidation as it unfolded in a cohort of women who experienced early adulthood during the early 1960s. Prototypes of identity in marriage were developed to reflect the different ways these women invested and evaluated their identities in the context of marriage. Results showed that ego-resiliency at age 21 and the experience of identity in marriage at age 27 were both related to identity consolidation at age 27, and findings also suggested that the relation of age 21 ego-resiliency to age 27 identity consolidation was mediated by identity in marriage. Finally, successful identity consolidation was associated with increasing ego-resiliency from age 21 to age 27.


This article explores the relationships between the Identity Statuses and Attentional and Interpersonal Styles of female college undergraduates. The authors found that students in the foreclosure status were least able to integrate ideas and think analytically, whereas
moratorium and achievement statuses were better able to process large amounts of information. The diffusion and foreclosure statuses were more likely than moratorium and achievement to make errors in judgments due to reduced attentional focus. In relation to the social influence domain, identity-achievement students were more likely to verbally-aggressive behavior, whereas identity foreclosure was related to a greater degree of image-control. Finally, the lower ego-identity statuses (diffusion and foreclosure) were associated with more frequent use of deception. This article was referenced in the current research to support the idea that diffused identity has been associated with uncertainty of self, as well as with relative difficulty analyzing and integrating information from multiple perspectives.


This article examined changes in identity as measured by the Identity Scale of the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory. A group of 294 high school students participated in completion of the scale above in order to investigate whether identity changes occur with a general increase in maturity during adolescence or if identity develops form a more contextualized vantage point. The findings suggest that a decremental change in identity was related to persistent problems with mothers and friends, specifically a lack of communication with mothers and persistent conflicts with friends. This study was referenced in the current research to support the idea that relational disturbances, like quarreling, becoming very angry, avoiding one another, and feeling that the one’s mother
(or child) is disappointed in oneself can lead to decrements in identity. However, in cases where mother-adolescent communication improved, adolescents reported marked improvement in sharing their feelings with their mothers, accepting advice, being able to compromise, and feeling better after talking with their mothers. Consistent with such findings, from the standpoint of the BEVI, the strength of the relationship between early life events and identity diffusion by demonstrating that the greater the degree of Negative Life Events, the more likely individuals are to “strongly agree” with items that load statistically on Identity Diffusion.


This article reviews two forms of well-being, namely: the hedonic approach and the eudaimonic approach. Well-being, as a general construct, is concerned with optimal experience and functioning. The Hedonic approach focuses on happiness and defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance. The Eudaimonic approach, on the other hand, focuses on meaning and self-realization, defining well-being in terms of the degree to which an individual is fully functioning. The current research references this article to support the types of well-being and the variable associated with positive well-being outcomes. Importantly, the connection between well-being and identity development is suggestive that the motivations behind identity commitments is significant to the prediction well-being. However, the enactment of commitments, in itself, does not appear sufficient to establish feelings of eudaimonic well being in
Western societies (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Importantly, the relative autonomy, referred to as “volition” (Ryan & Deci, 2001) of self-concordant goals has been shown to be predictive of well-being outcomes in cross-cultural research, suggesting that the autonomy of one’s goals may matter, regardless of collectivist or individualist context.


This article attempts to operationalize aspects of well-being, such as self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, and self-growth. Three hundred and twenty-one people, young, middle-aged, and older adults completed self-report ratings on things such as affect balance and life satisfaction. The results suggest that positive relations with others, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth were not strongly tied to prior assessment indices. This finding supports the idea that aspects of positive functioning have not been represented in the empirical arena. The current research references this article to support the finding that the way an individual interprets their life may influence their overall well-being.


This article addresses how marriage patterns differ in the United States depending on race and education. Schneider argues that one explanation for these marital divides may be the role of personal wealth in marriage entry. The author uses an event-history model and
data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 cohort to demonstrate that wealth plays an important predicting factor in first marriage. Also, wealth was found to play a role in asset ownership by race and education to explain a significant portion of the race and education gap in first marriage. This article is referenced in the current research to help explain the findings of individuals in an identity diffuse status being more likely to be married at a young age. Additionally, this article supports the idea that factors such as: ethnic group, socioeconomic status and education level can impact the decision or necessity to get married and so, although a relationship between identity diffusion and marital status exists. However, in more Western cultural contexts, research conducted on the relationship between identity development and marriage has indicated that marriage can be considered an “identity investment,” suggesting that individuals enter into marriage with a certain level of commitment or with a particular mindset.


This article examined the structure of identity consolidation and its’ relationship to positive and negative psychosocial functioning in emerging adulthood. The sample for the study consisted of 234 ethnically diverse university students who completed measures of identity synthesis, identity status and identity capital perspectives. Measure of agency and subjective well-being, depression, anxiety, impulsivity and tolerance for deviance were also used. It was found that identity consolidation was better observed as separate, correlated processes, rather than a single process with multiple components. The current
research references this article as support for the notion that a clear and coherent sense of identity is associated with a positive self-image and less likelihood of psychological distress.


This article evaluated an empirically based, identity status model in order to determine whether all four of Marcia’s identity statuses would emerge empirically. The study drew from an ethnically diverse sample of 9034 emerging-adult students, who completed measures of identity exploration and commitment, as well as identity synthesis and confusion, positive and negative psychosocial functioning and health-compromising behavior. Results of the analysis support all four of Marcia’s identity statuses, as well as Carefree Diffusion and Undifferentiated statuses and provide evidence of concurrent validity, construct validity and practical applicability of these statuses. The current research references this article to support the finding that a clear and coherent sense of identity is associated with positive self-image and a lower likelihood of externalizing or internalizing symptoms of psychological distress, whereas identity diffusion is associated with more symptoms of psychological distress.

This article investigates the psychological aspects of identity formation, style, status and process, in relation to personal agency and the individualization process. The article draws from the premise that emerging adulthood is the prolonged transition to adulthood and that the role of personal agency in individualization is important but not well understood. The authors found that higher levels of agency were positively associated to exploration and flexible commitment, but unrelated to conformity and negatively related to avoidance. Additionally, a polarity between developmental and default forms of individualization was found. This study was replicated across three U.S. ethnic groups and the results supported the idea that emerging adults utilize personal agency capacities in varying degrees and that the degree to which agency was used directly related to the coherence of the emerging adults’ identity. This article was used in the current research to support the idea that an emerging adults beliefs and values in areas like career, partnership and family are related to and important influences in their identity development.

This article investigated the role personal identity consolidation can have in protecting emerging adults from risk behaviors. A sample of 1546 college students completed measures of personal identity consolidation and recent risk behavior engagement. The authors found that personal identity consolidation was negatively related to binge drinking, illicit drug use, sexual risk behaviors and risky driving. This article was referenced in the current research to provide support for the risks associated with having a fragmented sense of identity, often associated with the diffuse identity status. Furthermore, it supports the current research findings to poorer psychosocial adjustment and health-compromising behaviors associated with a diffuse identity.


This article examines the relationship of changes in adolescent-reported family functioning and changes in identity confusion to the onset of substance use and sexual behaviors. A sample of 250 Hispanic adolescents from immigrant families were followed for 3 years and the results indicated that those adolescents whose identity
confused scores increased were more likely to initiate cigarette use, alcohol use and sexual behaviors. Adolescents whose identity confusion scores remained stable or decreased were less likely to engage in these behaviors. The current research references this article to emphasize that adolescents in the identity diffuse status are ore likely to engage in risk taking behavior than individuals in the identity achieved status.


This article argues that acculturation represents changes in cultural identity and personal identity. Additionally, the authors suggest that the personal identity has the potential to ‘anchor’ immigrant people during transition to a new society. Emphasis is placed on the experiences of nonwhite immigrant individuals moving to Western nations and calls for research on unexplored aspects of the relationship of acculturation to personal and social identity. The current research references this article to support and better understand identity development differences from a cultural context. Additionally, this article supports the idea that young people in largely open Western societies have a great deal of potential values and beliefs from which to choose, whereas young people in hierarchically structured societies are more likely to be expected to internalize values and beliefs from family members or other elders.

This article reported the results of three studies that evaluated the psychometric properties of scores generated by using the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory. Study 1 found that overall identity consisting of “method effects” factors for identity synthesis and confusion, largely invariant across gender and Whites, Blacks and Hispanics. Study 2 found that overall identity, identity synthesis and identity confusion were observed to have convergent validity with another Eriksonian measure and measures of identity statuses. Finally, Study 3 found that the EPSO scores were shown to have construct validity through self-esteem, purpose in life, internal locus of control, ego strength, anxiety and depression. This article was referenced in the current research to support the idea that a diffused sense of identity, which can take either the form of disinterest in identity exploration, or “carefree diffusion,” or a willingness to engage in identity exploration but not having the psychological resources to do so, “diffused diffusion,” is associated with a range of internalizing and externalizing symptoms, such as illicit drug use and sexual risk taking.
This article investigated the relationship between personal and ethnic identity to adaptive and maladaptive psychosocial functioning. Adaptive functioning, considered to be high levels of self-esteem, having a purpose in life, an internal locus of control and ego strength, was contrasted with maladaptive functioning, which included: depression, anxiety, impulsivity and a tolerance for deviance. In addition to the relationship between identity and psychosocial functioning, the extent to which the relationships were mediated by identity confusion was also examined. A multi-ethnic sample of 905 university students completed measures of personal and ethnic identity exploration and adaptive and maladaptive psychosocial functioning. It was found that current personal identity exploration was had a negative correlation with adaptive functioning and positive association with anxiety and impulsivity. The opposite pattern was found for past personal identity exploration, suggesting that the process of identity exploration can foster feelings of distress and poorer coping. The authors found that all of the relationships were mediated by identity confusion, either positive for current exploration or negative for past exploration. Ethnic identity exploration was found to not directly related to psychosocial functioning. This article was referenced in the current research to support the finding that if an individual is non-White, disabled, and of low income, they also are more likely to exhibit a higher degree of Identity Diffusion. On the positive side, such assurance of identity suggests the relative absence of upset about who one is or where one is going vis-
à-vis these political and religious affiliations. Additionally, it arguably is normative for young people to experience uncertainty, confusion, and the like, during the identity exploration phase, of this stage of life, which theoretically could be manifesting as a relatively high degree of Identity Diffusion on the BEVI, for individuals who have not embraced these political and religious statuses.


This article proposes a model, the Equilintegration (EI) Theory, and method, the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI) that can be used by faculty, training staff and supervisors of students in Combined-Integrated Doctoral Programs to assess and cultivate the basic values of education (self-awareness, self-assessment and self-reflection). The current research draws upon the EI theory and BEVI data to explore and examine antecedent variables, as well as beliefs and values, that influence and shape subsequent identity development.


This article discusses the Justification Hypothesis (JH; Henriques, 2003) and the need to further specify what it is, how it can be operationalized and measured, as well as what it
can and cannot predict in the “real world.” This article conceptualizes the act of “justification” as the “ongoing attempt to convince self and/or others that one’s beliefs and values...is correct, defensible, and good.” This paper examines of the justification system can be studied via research and theory on beliefs and values through the Equilintegration (EI) Theory model and the method of the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI). The current research draws upon the EI theory and BEVI data to explore and examine antecedent variables, as well as beliefs and values, that influence and shape subsequent identity development.


This article explores whether self-concordance, the pursuit of goals because they fit with an individual’s underlying interests and values rather than other-directed motives, is true in both Western and non-Western cultures. Self-concordance has been found to evidence higher subjective well-being in Western contexts; however, in non-Western cultures that emphasize people’s duty to conform to societal expectations and group norms, it is thought that self-concordance may not related positively with well-being. The authors studied self-concordance and subjective well-being in four cultures: U.S., China, South Korea and Taiwan. It was found that self-concordance was “equal” in U.S., Chinese and South Korean samples but somewhat less self-concordance in the Taiwanese sample. Additionally, self-concordance was found to predict subjective well-being in all four cultures and the authors argue that “owning one’s actions” may be important for most, if
not all, humans. This article is referenced in the current research to better understand and support the idea that the enactment of commitments, in itself, does not appear sufficient to establish feelings of eudaimonic well being in Western societies and, importantly, the relative autonomy, referred to as “volition” (Ryan & Deci, 2001) of self-concordant goals has been shown to be predictive of well-being outcomes in cross-cultural research, suggesting that the autonomy of one’s goals may matter, regardless of collectivist or individualist context.


This article investigated the significance of childhood Big Five personality traits in the development of competence and resilience in early adulthood. The Project Competence Longitudinal Study tracked 205 people from childhood to emerging and young adulthood. It was found that childhood personality was a significant main effect for predicting adult outcomes, when controlling for adversity. The childhood group with personality traits of conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness and low levels of neuroticism showed higher levels of resiliency in emerging and young adulthood than the maladaptive group. Importantly, some children showed “turnaround” and changed from the maladaptive group in emerging adulthood to the resilient group in young adulthood and showed higher levels of conscientiousness than the persistently maladaptive group, even in the face of adversity. The authors argue that these findings suggest that children who more successfully adapt in adulthood have the capacities for emotional regulation,
empathy, connection, dedication and mastery. The current article was referenced to support the research findings that individuals who experienced more negative events reported greater use of coping strategies, which suggests that such formative variables do not have to lead to poorer life outcomes, but may culminate in resilience.


This book chapter reviews various approaches to self-organization that have implications for identity development and adjustment. Four issues are discussed: the advantages of maintaining context-specific multiple selves versus a single, well-defined core self; the ways multiple selves contribute to motivation; how organization of positive and negative attributes within the self-structure impacts mood, self-esteem and self-clarity; and the possibilities for self-change. The current research references this chapter to describe how the process of “self-organization” as including positive and negative self-beliefs, and the way these self-beliefs are compartmentalized or integrated into aspects of overall self-concept influence an individual’s behavior, cognitive capacities and emotional reactions.


This article examined age-related trends in identity statuses ideologies in the areas of vocation, religion, lifestyle and politics during early adolescence. The results suggest a
developmental progression in adolescent vocational identity that increases as the proportion of participants in the identity achieved and moratorium statuses. Furthermore, this developmental progression is observed with a decrease in the proportion of participants in the diffused and foreclosed statuses. The other domains explored in this article appear to be related, but not as strong, as the domain of vocation, to identity formation. This article was referenced in the current research to support how the status of identity diffusion appears to be a “less developed” identity status and supports the current research finding that adolescents in the diffuse status have poorer psychosocial and vocational outcomes than their more “identity developed” peers.


This article explored the assumption that adolescent psychosocial adjustment will be more positive when their behavior is guided by autonomous, rather than controlled, motives. Specifically, the study tested this assumption in relation to adolescents’ identity style. The authors found that motives for using an information-oriented or normative identity style, explained the variance in adjustment outcomes. For example, it was found that autonomous motives underlying these identity styles were positively related to commitment and personal well-being. In contrast, controlled motives were negatively related to these adjustment outcomes. Additionally, autonomy-supportive parenting was positively related to autonomous motives and negatively related to controlled motives.
underlying adolescent identity styles. This article was referenced in the current research to support the idea that adolescents in predominantly Western societies who actively are encouraged to explore the validity of information provided to them about the nature of reality, and to critically appraise parental norms, subsequently develop stronger commitments, such as what to study, while also demonstrating a greater degree of subjectively experienced well-being.


This book chapter compares the self-determination theory (SDT) on identity with prevailing models of identity formation, particularly constructivist models and also reviews research that is deemed relevant to the idea that identities need to be congruent with the self in order to foster well-being and adjustment in adolescence and beyond. The importance of distinguishing between the self and identity, such that SDT attempts to do, it that identities may vary in the degree to which they are congruent with an individuals’ basic growth tendencies of the self, which are motivated by the psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. It is thought that the level of congruence between identity and the self is dependent on the motives underlying identity commitment (pressure versus volition) and the content of the goals defining identity (extrinsic versus intrinsic). This chapter was referenced in the current research in order to support the finding that a clear, healthy, and flexible sense of identity is associated with a higher
degree of having one’s “core needs” met, both historically and currently. Additionally, the current chapter supports the research findings that identity, as the self’s narrative about itself, is productively understood as a verbal representation of the individual’s beliefs about self to self, others, and the larger world, which manifests at any moment in time as the most recent culmination of a complex interaction between core needs and formative variables.


This article explores the two different ways parental autonomy can be perceived and distinguished. Parental autonomy support was defined in terms of either: promotion of independence (PI) or promotion of volitional functioning (PVF). The goal of this article was to establish empirical distinctiveness of the two conceptualizations of parental autonomy and the relative contribution these forms of autonomy have to the prediction of adolescents’ adjustment. For this overall study, the authors completed 3 studies, 2 of which sample late adolescents and one samples middle adolescence. Through factor analytic techniques, the authors found a distinction between PVF and PI; however, through structural equation modeling, PVF predicted adjustment but PI did not. The article demonstrates the different ways parents can facilitate a sense of well-being in their children through their emphasis and promotion of volitional functioning. The current research references and reported results from this study in order to support the view that a
recurring theme in relation to the development of healthy identity is the relative degree to which autonomy, defined as the “promotion of volition.”


This book chapter argues the need to turn to social psychological theories to answers questions of identity. The author points to the differences among people while holding theses differences in social structure, location and interaction, such that these networks of social relations creates a self-concept composed of multiple identities. This theory also discusses concepts of identity commitment and salience, proposing that processes link commitment to identity salience and salience to role-related choices. It is suggestive that an individual’s’ choices independent of the commitment underlying their salience. The current research references this article, which situates an individuals’ senses of self within the societal roles (e.g., mother, doctor) that they occupy.


This article investigates the identity statuses and self-actualization. Valde (1996) added a fifth identity status, identity closure, to account for status regression. Importantly, the author found an operational definition of identity achievement (exploration, tentative commitment and openness to alternatives) to be more accurately named “open achievement,” whereas identity closure is a “re-foreclosure.” The current research
references Valde (1996) to support the idea that identity closure/foreclosure can have positive attributes, such that individuals in identity closure have made commitments and can feel secure in these decisions.


This article discusses the influence of parental values and social values have on value development of offspring and youth, referred to as Zeitgeist. This study focuses on the relationship between family obligations and values placed on offspring from 10 Western countries. A significant relationship between the valued placed on family obligations, independent of gender. Zeitgeist effects (the passing of cultural values to youth) were found both intergenerational and intergenerational. The strength of these Zeitgeist effects depended on either a person’s own ethnic group or the wider community. Importantly, a difference was found between national adolescents’ and immigrant groups’ family obligations, such that only the ethnic Zeitgeist played a significant role in family obligation for immigrant groups. The current research references this article to provide a definition for the term “Zeitgeist” as well as further support for the importance of acknowledging cultural differences in the development and investigation of identity.

This chapter attempts to clarify the understanding of the term “identity” and how it relates to associated terms like “self.” Discussion of key points the divides existing literature on identity focuses on issues such: is identity stable or fluid; is it primarily personal, relational or collective; and is it discovered, personally constructed or socially constructed. The authors proposed that these questions represent artificial distinctions. Lastly, as this is a first chapter, it outlines the aims for this book and describes the contributions of each chapter. This chapter is references in the current research as support for the principal investigative goals of the current research and support for the continued exploration into the properties of identity development. Furthermore, this chapter identifies the varying current discussions in the identity literature and emphasizes the continued need to investigate identity related issues.


This article examines the aspects of Erikson’s’ (1968) theory of psychosocial development that concern the formation of an individual’s personal identity. Waterman (1982) reviews the literature and hypothesizes that when identity is expanded to include the processes through which identity is formed, the identity status will change from
diffusion – foreclosure, then moratorium and eventually to achievement. Waterman (1982) explores the circumstances that influence these identity status changes, in relation to the direction and time, sex differences and the identification of antecedent conditions relating to the choice of developmental pathway. The current research reviews and found support in the various familial circumstances that may influence the development of various identity statuses, specifically the type of parenting one experiences of the development of identity foreclosure or diffusion.


This article reviews the views of A. van Hoof’s critique of the identity status literature. This article suggests that the identity status paradigm is strongly grounded in Erikson’s psychosocial theory and the content domains in the Identity Status Interview are all areas Erikson focused on in his writings. This article reflects that although there are a number of common theoretical aspects to the identity status theorists and Erikson, notable differences exist as well. The article acknowledges that the identity status paradigm has numerous elements that are validated in terms of the broader construct of identity. The current research references this article to support the notion that numerous constructs influence the development of personal identity.

This article examined the relationship between ego identity status and three conceptions of well-being (subjective, psychological and eudaimonic). 217 college students completed measures of well-being, such as the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status. Identity Achievement was positively correlated with all three conceptions of well-being, whereas Identity Diffusion was negatively related to all forms of well-being. Moratorium and Foreclosure Statuses were negative for measures of psychological well-being but not significant for measure of subjective and eudaimonic well-being. The current research referenced this article to further support and emphasize how individuals in the Identity Diffuse status experience less amounts of overall well-being than the other identity statuses.


This book chapter explores the philosophical underpinnings of Eudaimonic or “true self” potential and the way these potentials influence who the person is able to become. The author attempts to clarify the way in which discovering one’s “daimon” influences identity formation through: discovery of personal potential, choosing a purpose in life and finding opportunities to act upon these potentials and purposes. Waterman (2011)
proposes that the construct of intrinsic motivation is key to understanding how an individual recognizes their potential, including: personal expressiveness, flow interest and other subjective components when someone is intrinsically motivated. This chapter is referenced in the current research as support for the way in which personal goals, beliefs and values influence the choices one makes and their overall identity development.
Appendix B

Dissertation Defense PowerPoint Slides

Identity Development and the Construction of Self: Findings and Implications from the Forum BEVI Project

Spaeth, J., Shealy, C., Staton, R. & Sternberger, L.

Presentation Overview

- Abstract
- Introduction
- The Equilintegration (EI) Framework and Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI)
- Beliefs, Values, and Identity Development
- The Structure and Process of Identity: Neo-Eriksonian Perspectives
- The Relationship of Identity Diffusion to other BEVI Constructs
- Identity Diffusion and Tolerance of Disequilibrium
- Identity Diffusion and Critical Thinking
- Identity Diffusion and Access to Self, Other, and the Larger World
- Identity Diffusion as Cause and Effect
- Assessment and Analysis
- In Conclusion
- References
Abstract

The current study focuses on factor analytic and correlational matrix data from the Forum BEVI Project (www.ibavi.org/content/featured-projects/), a national learning assessment initiative, with a particular emphasis on the “Identity Diffusion” scale from the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI). Results suggest that the degree to which an individual is undifferentiated from his or her parents, experiences a foreclosed identity, and reports a troubled childhood is associated with a wide range of capacities and beliefs about self, others, and the world at large such as emotional expressiveness as well as environmental, cultural, and global concerns. In the context of the Equilintegration framework, this chapter considers issues of definition and measurement for the Identity Diffusion(ID) construct on the BEVI. Moreover, formative variables (e.g., background and historical factors that are etiologically predictive of ID) and outcome variables (e.g., using structural equation modeling to predict pathways from formative variables to ID to grade point average) also are investigated. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of ID for understanding developmental aspects of the construction of self.

Introduction

• A diffused sense of identity can take either the form of disinterest in identity exploration (i.e., “carefree diffusion”) or a willingness to engage in identity exploration, but not having the psychological resources to do so (i.e., “diffused diffusion”).

  (Schwartz, 2001)

• A diffused identity is associated with a range of internalizing and externalizing symptoms, such as illicit drug use and sexual risk taking.

  (Schwartz et al., 2008; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Wang, & Olthuis, 2009)
The Equilintegration (EI) Framework and Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI)

- In this paper, we describe theory and data from a multi-year, multi-institution assessment of learning initiative called the Forum BEVI Project, which may help illuminate the antecedents of identity development in general and identity diffusion in particular.
- Equilintegration (EI) Theory seeks to explain “the processes by which beliefs, values, and ‘worldviews’ are acquired and maintained, why their alteration is typically resisted, and how and under what circumstances their modification occurs” (Shealy, 2004, pp. 1075)
- Derivative of EI Theory, the Equilintegration or EI Self explains integrative and synergistic processes by which beliefs and values are acquired, maintained, and transformed as well as how and why these are linked to the formative variables, core needs, and adaptive potential of the self. (Shealy, 2013)

The Equilintegration (EI) Framework and Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI)

- Concomitant with EI Theory and the EI Self, the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI) is a comprehensive analytic tool in development since the early 1990s that examines:
  - how and why we come to see ourselves, others, and the larger world as we do (e.g., how life experiences, culture, and context affect our beliefs, values, and worldview)
  - as well as the influence of such processes on multiple aspects of human functioning (e.g., learning processes, relationships, personal growth, the pursuit of life goals).
The Equiintegration (EI) Framework and Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI)

- The Forum BEVI Project is a multi-institution, multi-year project coordinated by the Forum on Education Abroad (www.forumea.org) and International Beliefs and Values Institute (www.ibavi.org).
- Participant demographics included:
  - undergraduate students (96.7%) and graduate students (3.3%),
  - Age ranged: 17—26 (mean of 19),
  - 93.3% were reported U.S. citizenship, non-U.S. citizens were (N = 156 or 6.7%),
  - Participants were drawn from 38 different countries of origin,
  - 79.9 percent of the reported as Caucasian with 20.1% as non-Caucasian (6.6% Black or African American; .9% American Indian or Alaskan Native; 7.4% Asian or Pacific Islander; Hispanic / Latino 2.9%; Other, 3%),
  - 40.8 percent of the sample was female, with 59.2 male.

Beliefs, Values, and Identity Development

- Consistent with the EI framework and BEVI, multiple constructs and variables have been invoked to describe or explain identity, including:
  - personal goals, beliefs, and values (Marcia, 1966; Waterman, 1999),
  - self-esteem and reflexive self-evaluations (Kernis et al., 2008),
  - one’s unique and overarching life story (McAdams et al., 2006).
- Many theoretical approaches to identity focus on the development and composition of “beliefs and values” —as well as how individuals experience themselves, others, and the larger world and these fundamental identity processes are central to the EI model and the BEVI method.
Beliefs, Values, and Identity Development

  (Berzonsky, 2011, pp. 56)

- To adapt to and cope with dynamic conditions and possibilities in our world, Berzonsky (1990, 2003, 2011) describes how existing identity structures both receive information and adjust themselves to accommodate information that is incompatible with one’s existing sense of identity.
  (Kerelman & Pittman, 2001)

- Overall, individuals who have a more coherent and flexible sense of identity display:
  - more proactive coping skills
    (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Folkman, 2010)
  - greater perceived control over their decisions are better able to adapt to and cope with difficult life situations, as referenced in the theory of planned behavior
    (Ajzen, 2012; Jopp & Schmitt, 2010)

Beliefs, Values, and Identity Development

- Among other processes that influence the development of one’s identity—what are called “formative variables” from an EI standpoint—is the *Zeitgeist* in which one’s identity develops, defined as “the influence exerted by the sharing of the values and ideas prevailing in the social environment of each generation.”
  (Vedder et al., 2009, pp. 642)

- The implications of such an antecedent variable perspective for cross-cultural perspectives on the development of identity should be clear since what we believe and value depends in no small part on what was available for acquisition.
  (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2006)
The Structure and Process of Identity: Neo-Eriksonian Perspectives

• Although there are many frameworks on identity, the EI perspective is most consistent with, and informed by, Erik Erikson and the neo-Eriksonian perspectives, particularly regarding the acquisition, maintenance, and transformation of beliefs and values. By way of brief review, Erikson (1968) characterized identity development as:
  • employ[ing] a process of simultaneous reflection and observation […] the process described is always changing and developing: at its best it is a process of increasing differentiation, and it becomes ever more inclusive as the individual grows aware of a widening circle of others significant to him, from the maternal person to ‘mankind’ (pp. 22-23).

The Structure and Process of Identity: Neo-Eriksonian Perspectives

• Extensions of Erikson’s and Marcia’s approaches have included but are by no means limited to:
  • social-cognitive accounts of the ways in which identity is constructed
  • humanistic perspectives on self-realization and self-discovery
    (Waterman, 2007, 2011)
  • sociological perspectives on how identity-related skills and knowledge are used to pursue one’s “core needs” as well as roles, positions, and other social resources
    (Côté, 1996; Côté & Levine, 2002; Shealy, 2013)
  • The common denominator among these various “neo-Eriksonian” approaches is that they focus on the development of a coherent sense of self, which is experienced by self and expressed to others and the larger world.
The Structure and Process of Identity: Neo-Eriksonian Perspectives

- Marcia (1966) distinguished four identity statuses (achieved, foreclosed, moratorium and diffused) based on the degree of exploration and/or commitment in which an adolescent engages.
  - The current paper focuses on the processes associated with foreclosed, and especially diffused, identity statuses.
  - Identity diffusion indicates that an adolescent has not yet made identity commitments and may—or may not have—explored among identity alternatives. (Mc cus et al., 2010)

- Although the process of making commitments has been observed to operate similarly in Western and East Asian cultures, the process of identity exploration does not appear to process the same in East Asian countries as it does in Western cultural contexts. (Cheng & Berman, in press)

The Structure and Process of Identity: Neo-Eriksonian Perspectives

- The relative autonomy, referred to as “volition” of self-concordant goals has been shown to be predictive of well-being outcomes in cross-cultural research. (Chirkov & Ryan, 2000).

- In Western societies, however, the strength of autonomous identity commitments has been associated positively with vigilant decision making and associated negatively with procrastination, rationalization, and the tendency to experience self-consciousness (Berzonsky, 1990; 1992).

- In contrast, for cultures that are more interdependent and relational, the association between self-consistency and psychological well being is weaker; as such, the goal of Chinese adolescents may tend toward “self-in relation” rather than an “autonomous self” (Cross et al., 2003; Lam, 1997, pp. 108).
The Structure and Process of Identity: Neo-Eriksonian Perspectives

- Although a number of BEVI scales have relevance to definitional and etiological matters regarding identity, the scale of Identity Diffusion (ID) is most directly related to the neo-Eriksonian perspectives described above.
- Operationally, Identity Diffusion on the BEVI refers to “the degree to which an individual is undifferentiated from parents, experiences a foreclosed identity, reports a troubled childhood, feels little agency or ability to affect change, reports odd or unusual etiological perspectives, and is searching but feels helpless, lost and confused.”

(Shealy, 2013, pp. X)

The editor expresses gratitude to Seth Schwartz, Ph.D. for his many excellent contributions to this chapter including the recommendation that this BEVI scale, originally labeled “Identity Closure,” be renamed “Identity Diffusion.”

Items that Load Statistically on Identity Diffusion on the BEVI

- Consideration of this statistically derived constellation of items (from exploratory factor analysis) is instructive at a number of levels.
  - I have to admit that I am just like my parents.
  - I am the way I am because I was born that way.
  - I have gone through a painful identity crisis.
  - I never felt like I was good enough for my family.
  - Even though we expect them to be, men are not really built to be faithful in marriage.
  - Beings from other planets have helped our species.
  - Parents should stay together for the sake of their children.
The Structure and Process of Identity: Neo-Eriksonian Perspectives

- The constellation of sample items that load statistically on ID, suggest an overarching experience of a troubled childhood, feelings of pain and crisis, the sense of “stuckness”, and paranormal claims, such as, “Beings from other planets have helped our species” appear to characterize a high degree of ID.
- Arseth et al. (2009) found that individuals in the diffuse identity status had the lowest mean proportion of secure attachment when compared to the other three identity statuses and that a diffuse status was negatively correlated with secure attachment.
- A high degree of “identity diffusion” on the BEVI also appears indicative of a lack of self-exploration (Valde, 1996), such individuals have accepted their fate, even as they recognize the unfortunate implications of doing so, and have eschewed a process of “institutionalized moratoria.”

The Relationship of Identity Diffusion to other BEVI Constructs

- From an EI perspective—and on the basis of correlation matrix data—a clear relationship exists between formative variables (e.g., life history; background) and the degree of ID that is reported on the BEVI.
- From a developmental psychopathology approach toward understanding mediators of adjustment, a high, or low, degree of ID also is associated with other aspects of how the individual experiences self, others, and the world at large.
  
(Cummings et al., 2002)
- Although “identity” has been related to many aspects of human existence, the empirical linkages among hypothesized causal pathways and outcomes are often not well specified.
  
(Harter, 1999; Shealy, 2013)
The Relationship of Identity Diffusion to other BEVI Constructs

- In Table 1 below, we report the relationships of ID to other BEVI Scales, which are derived from correlational matrix data (Spaeth et al., 2010).

- **Scale 3. Identity Diffusion** (.82, SF 21) (undifferentiated from parents, identity is foreclosed, troubled childhood, feels little agency or ability to affect change, searching and lost but feels helpless, confused)

  - Needs Closure (.84)
  - Sociocultural Openness (.71)
  - Socioemotional Convergence (.69)
  - Negative Life Events (.66)
  - Emotional Attunement (.63)
  - Ecological Resonance (.49)
  - Hard Structure (.42)
  - Divergent Determinism (.42)
  - Socioreligious Traditionalism (.24)

- Note from Table 1 that the internal consistency of ID is .82. Likewise, the “21” refers to the fact that this scale was extracted via promax exploratory factor analysis using SPSS as the 21st factor. Along with other criterion-based strategies for factor reduction, only those factors that had an eigenvalue of at least 2, item loadings of at least .30, and internal consistencies of at least .75 were retained.

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The Relationship of Identity Diffusion to other BEVI Constructs

- Note from the above correlation matrix data that Negative Life Events (NLE) is strongly and positively correlated (.66) with ID.
  - More specifically, such items address the client’s beliefs about her/his childhood, family, presence or absence of abuse or neglect, early development, schooling, relational history, and so forth.

- Although statistically differentiable from ID via exploratory factor analysis, Needs Closure on the BEVI is highly correlated with ID (.84).

- What is most interesting is that Needs Closure also includes odd explanations for why things are the way they are as well thought processes that might be described, from a clinical standpoint, as distorted if not disturbed.
The Relationship of Identity Diffusion to other BEVI Constructs

- Results also are consistent with literature suggesting that negative family dynamics, including conflicted attachment, poor communication, and low autonomy, all impact the healthy development of identity.
  
  (Cummings et al., 2002; Shealy, 1995; Shealy, Bhuyan, & Sternberger, in press)

- For Erikson, such desires for approval and recognition also have been associated with jealousy, hypersensitivity, and criticism toward their children.

- Along these lines, and more empirically grounded, found that poor communication between mothers and offspring was associated with regressed identity.

  Rcis and Youniss (2004)

The Relationship of Identity Diffusion to other BEVI Constructs

- From an etiological perspective, a recurring theme in relation to the development of healthy identity is the relative degree to which autonomy, defined as the “promotion of volition” is encouraged in offspring.

  (Soensen et al., 2007)

- In a cross-cultural sense, Kagitcibasi (2005) named the “autonomous-relational” self as a way to integrate both the desire for differentiation and the importance of being able to rely on others.

  (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2001)

- Of great importance is the validity to which these statements apply to adolescents outside of the US, as the majority of samples to which these theories have been tested are from western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic societies (WEIRD).

  (Arnett, 2008; Henrich et al., 2010)
The Relationship of Identity Diffusion to other BEVI Constructs

- As further evidence that one’s perception of identity is affected not only by early family processes, but may be impacted by formative variables that are operative throughout the lifespan, Berman et al. (2008) found that clinically significant improvements in identity exploration and achievement—as well as significant declines in identity distress and foreclosure—could be facilitated by a program that emphasized active reflection on oneself and one’s aspirations.
- Overall, these results indicate that, as identity commitment increases, identity distress decreases, a finding, which has potential applied implications for individuals scoring high on ID.

Identity Diffusion and Tolerance of Disequilibrium

- On the BEVI, two scales—Basic Closedness and Hard Structure—address the putative capacity; both are correlated positively with Identity Diffusion (.62 and .42 respectively).
- Overall, this pattern suggests that, the higher an individual scores on Basic Closedness, the more likely he or she is to report feelings of insecurity, to have difficulty with introspection, to struggle to acknowledge basic emotional states, and to experience difficulty with decision-making.
- The construct of Hard Structure taps into similar conceptual ground by assessing the degree to which individuals are overly settled on, and confident in, “who they are,” experience no regrets about their own life, and report that they seldom are caught “off guard.”
Identity Diffusion and Tolerance of Disequilibrium

- From a clinical standpoint, in order to apprehend who one is and what one may do with one’s life, it may be necessary to experience and work through sometimes unpleasant emotions as well as inherent paradoxes of life, and then move forward, better informed by these deep and complex aspects of human experience.
- ID is recognized to be a poorly integrated self-concept and conception of others, and, at the extreme version of identity diffusion, has been linked with psychological dysfunction and diagnoses, such as Borderline Personality Disorder (Kernberg & Clarkin, 1993)
- Although seemingly plausible, it remains an empirical question as to whether such mental health and emotional functioning outcomes are applicable in non-Western contexts.

Identity Diffusion and Critical Thinking

- From an EI perspective, the category of Critical Thinking on the BEVI encompasses scales that address an individual’s tendency and capacity to hold complexity and derive attributions about self, others, and the larger world in a relatively sophisticated and nuanced manner.
- Of the scales in this category, ID is correlated (.42) with Divergent Determinism, which measures an individual’s tendency to prefer contrarian (e.g., arguing for the sake of arguing without genuine reflection or goal in mind) and non-reflective (e.g., no point in thinking about how things might have been) ways of relating to self, others, and the larger world.
- Not surprisingly, such a version of reality is likely to be associated with ID, since a predilection toward non-reflection about self, others, and the larger world tends to be associated with a more diffuse sense of identity (Waterman, 2007)
Identity Diffusion and Access to Self, Other, and the Larger World

- The three remaining categories on the BEVI refer to the ways in which individuals interact with and think about others, themselves, and the world at large:
  - Socioemotional Convergence (SEC) has a -.69 correlation with ID.
  - ID also has a correlation of -.71 with Sociocultural Openness (SO), which indicates the level to which an individual holds liberal and progressive views and is accepting, culturally attuned, open, and globally oriented.
  - ID is significantly and negatively correlated (.63) with Emotional Attunement (EA), which refers to an individual’s capacity to be aware of and able to express emotions in a healthy and effective manner.

Identity Diffusion and Access to Self, Other, and the World at Large

- ID is correlated negatively (-.49) with Ecological Resonance (ER), which is associated with a tendency to be concerned about ecological matters, value the rights of all, and contend that spirituality exists in the natural world.
- Finally, ID is correlated moderately (.24) with Socioreligious Traditionalism (SR), which measures the tendency of individuals to hold conventional religious beliefs and consider themselves to be God-fearing.
Identity Diffusion as Cause and Effect

- We tested a series of Structural Equation Models (SEMs) to ascertain the extent of empirical support for our theoretical understanding of these associations.
- In Figures 2—6, we focus on five outcomes that are components of fundamental aspects of identity: marital status, educational aspirations, religious orientation, political orientation, and grade point average.

Identity Diffusion as Cause and Effect

- For purposes of interpretation, note that all five of these models fit the data adequately using standard fit indices (e.g., RMSEA, CFI), meaning that relationships among variables are statistically significant, and that our theoretical models are empirically supported. However, any “dashed” lines refer to relationships that are not significant (i.e., solid lines refer to significant relationships).
- Moreover, from a theoretical standpoint (and SEM basically allows for the empirical evaluation of theoretically derived causal models), each of these SEMs essentially is asking whether “Formative Variables” (e.g., life history, demographics) are predictive of “Mediators” (which consists here of Identity Diffusion on the BEVI), which further are predictive of specific “Outcomes.”
Identity Diffusion as Cause and Effect

- First, across all five models, Formative Variables are strongly and significantly predictive of ID on the BEVI.
- Specifically, a higher extent of Negative Life Events is positively predictive of ID whereas a higher degree of Positive Life Events is negatively predictive of ID.
- Moreover, the same patterns apply to three other Formative Variables across all five models: Ethnicity, Disability, and Income. Specifically, being non-Caucasian, having a disability, and reporting lower income were significantly and positively predictive of higher ID.
- Second, ID also is predictive of these five outcomes.
  - Specifically, a higher degree of Identity Diffusion was:
    - 1) positively predictive of being married;
    - 2) negatively predictive of being Republican;
    - 3) negatively predictive of being Christian;
    - 4) negatively predictive of higher education aspirations; and
    - 5) negatively predictive of grade point average.

Assessment and Analysis

- ID essentially appears to be a measure of maladjustment, in that individuals who score highly on this scale tend to be less open or attuned to self, others, and the larger world, and less able to tolerate complexity.
- All of these findings are consistent with, and extend, data and theory from scholarship on the formation and nature of identity.
  - For example, a diffused identity has been associated with uncertainty of self and an intolerance of ambiguity (Berzonsky et al., 1990; Marcia, 1966);
  - as well as with relative difficulty analyzing and integrating information from multiple perspectives (Read et al., 1984);
  - Additionally, individuals in a state of diffused identity may be experienced by others across a spectrum, from “careless or carefree, [and] charming” to “psychopathic, independent or schizoid” (Marcia, 1980, pp. 111).
Assessment and Analysis

- Our initial results demonstrate that a higher degree of Negative Life Events and Needs Closure are associated with a greater degree of Identity Diffusion:
  - research on the ways individuals adapt to difficult life situations has been dominated by two classic traditions, focusing either on critical life events or on mechanisms of coping.
  - several forms of coping have become apparent:
    - problem-focused coping;
    - emotion-focused coping; and
    - avoidant coping.
    (Jopp & Schmitt, 2010; Carver & Conner-Smith, 2010).
- Individuals with more resources—such as a greater degree of “physical health, finances, and [supportive] relationships with family members and friends” (Moos & Holohan, 2003, pp. 1393) —as well as greater internal control beliefs (Jopp & Schmitt, 2010, pp. 169) —were less likely to report having experienced negative life events.

Assessment and Analysis

- From an EI perspective, and based on the correlation matrices presented above, a higher degree of Negative Life Events is associated with greater ID, which on the one hand begs the question of what types of “control beliefs” such individuals develop.
- The general point to be offered here is that a higher degree of exposure to Negative Life Events may well result in a greater array of control beliefs, but from the standpoint of the BEVI, such beliefs do not appear to be congruent with a higher degree of awareness or openness to self, to others, and to the larger world.
- Even so, exposure to learning experiences that are very different from those to which one is accustomed (e.g., study abroad), has been found in at least some instances to be associated with changes in how one experiences one’s own life history.
Assessment and Analysis

• The findings from the current study suggest that individuals who have struggled too much or not at all may engage in premature marriage and, in turn, hinder their overall identity development.
  • Importantly, the engagement in premature marriage does not necessarily lead to permanent hindrance in identity development.
  • Arnett (2011, 1998) found that individuals who marry early may miss the “emerging adult” experience but, in turn, develop a healthy sense of identity in relation to their new life status (i.e. as parents).
  • Importantly, it should be emphasized that factors such as one’s ethnic group, socioeconomic status, and education level can impact the decision or necessity to get married (Schneider, 2011).

Assessment and Analysis

• Interesting also is that a lower degree of ID appears to be associated with both Republicanism and a Christian orientation.
• Again, although hypothetical, given the mean age for this sample (19), on this specific BEVI scale, it could be that individuals who demonstrate a lower degree of ID are in fact less in conflict or turmoil about their focus or direction in life—and perhaps even subjectively “happier” (cf. Napier & Jost, 2008)—which theoretically could be associated with the assuredness that comes from these particular political and religious affiliations.
• Unlike their counterparts within a college or university setting, such individuals may not be experiencing the degree of angst that seems to typify this specific population, in part because these aspects of identity already have been determined.
Assessment and Analysis

- Lastly, the fact that a higher degree of ID also is predictive of lower aspirations for higher education as well as lower academic performance as defined by GPA appears consistent with multiple findings in the literature.
  - In particular, educational aspirations and performance would appear to be determined, at least in part, by the capacity to adapt to and cope with complexity, which is further associated with modification of extant identity structures.
  
  (Berzonsky, 2011)

- Likewise, given that greater resources, coping skills, and control beliefs are associated with the ability to manage difficult life situations, it stands to reason that a higher degree of Identity Diffusion would be predictive of lower academic aspirations and performance, particularly in the context of higher education.

  (Jopp & Schmitt, 2010)

In Conclusion

- First, in scholarly examinations of identity, we should focus upon questions of what and how.

- Second, the definition of what we mean by a “healthy” or “developed” sense of identity should be explicated, empirically and theoretically.

- Third and finally, the construct of “identity” should be understood in relation to overarching and encompassing aspects of self.
References


Lam. (1997).


Websites:

[www.forumea.org](http://www.forumea.org)
[www.ibavi.org](http://www.ibavi.org)
Appendix C

Dissertation Analyses

Gender

Q123. I have wondered about who I am and where I am going.

ANOVA RESULT

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a. R Squared = .020 (Adjusted R Squared = .019)

Q196. I like to think about who I am.

ANOVA RESULT

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Corrected Total: 911.864

a. R Squared = .004 (Adjusted R Squared = .004)

Q295. I was abused/neglected while growing up.

ANOVA RESULT

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a. R Squared = .008 (Adjusted R Squared = .007)
**Political Orientation**

**Q34. I have gone through a painful identity crisis.**

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| a. R Squared = 0.021 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.020)

**Q149. I am always trying to understand myself better.**

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| a. R Squared = 0.011 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.010)

**Q311. We find the answers when we look inside ourselves.**

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<td>4.583</td>
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<td>Error</td>
<td>828.929</td>
<td>2271</td>
<td>0.363</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Corrected</td>
<td>828.929</td>
<td>2271</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| a. R Squared = 0.006 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.005)
Setting

Q123. I have wondered about who I am and where I am going.

ANOVA RESULT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type II Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected</td>
<td>6.397</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.198</td>
<td>6.651</td>
<td>0.001</td>
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<td>22846.001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22846.001</td>
<td>47900.38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>6.397</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.198</td>
<td>6.651</td>
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<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>1105.598</td>
<td>2299</td>
<td>0.481</td>
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<td>23958</td>
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</table>

Corrected Total 1111.995 2301

a. R Squared = .006 (Adjusted R Squared = .005)

Q149. I am always trying to understand myself better.

ANOVA RESULT

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<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected</td>
<td>7.945</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.972</td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
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<td>3.972</td>
<td>9.305</td>
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<td>Error</td>
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<td>2297</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Corrected Total 987.249 2296

a. R Squared = .008 (Adjusted R Squared = .007)

Q295. I was abused/neglected while growing up.

ANOVA RESULT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type II Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected</td>
<td>27.383</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.692</td>
<td>25.608</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>6482.109</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6482.109</td>
<td>11886.85</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>27.383</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.692</td>
<td>25.608</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>1239.507</td>
<td>2273</td>
<td>0.545</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7749</td>
<td>2276</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Corrected Total 1266.891 2275

a. R Squared = .022 (Adjusted R Squared = .021)
### Socioeconomic Status

**Q34. I have gone through a painful identity crisis.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td><strong>Std. Error</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>2.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family annual income</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s education</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s education</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-square</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-square</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q123. I have wondered about who I am and where I am going.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td><strong>Std. Error</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family annual income</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s education</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s education</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-square</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-square</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q295. I was abused/neglected while growing up.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td><strong>Std. Error</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>2.031</td>
</tr>
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<td>Family annual income</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mother’s education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father’s education</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-square</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-square</td>
<td>0.034</td>
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</table>
### Scale 1 Negative Life Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.692</td>
<td>0.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grow up in urban setting</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>0.022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.227</td>
<td>0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible to receive services for students with disabilities</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>0.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>-0.029</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status is widowed</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td>0.247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents are paying for international activities</td>
<td>-0.073</td>
<td>0.021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have not studied foreign language</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>28.029***</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-square</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adj. R-square</td>
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</table>

### Scale 3 Identity Diffusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.643</td>
<td>1.638</td>
<td>1.330</td>
<td>2.495</td>
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</table>

### Demographics for BEVI Scales

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Source</th>
<th>Type IID</th>
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<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>946,019</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Life Events</td>
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<td>203,099</td>
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<td>67,033</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Error</td>
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<td>308.849</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>0.137</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>908,249</td>
<td>224</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R Squared = 0.403 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.402)
Scale 3 Identity Diffusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale 3 Identity Diffusion</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>2.071</td>
<td>0.116</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unstandardized Coefficients</td>
<td>Standardized Coefficients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grow up in urban setting</td>
<td>-0.129</td>
<td>0.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major in arts and humanities</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status widowed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political orientation is Republican</td>
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<td>0.121</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plan to study a language other than English</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not yet studied foreign language</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Chinese</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study foreign language in place other than home, school, and etc</td>
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<td>0.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-score</td>
<td>0.090</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-squart</td>
<td>0.087</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Structural Equation Models

Scale 3_1 Identity Diffusion

Scale 3_2_1 Identity Diffusion
Scale 3_4 Identity Diffusion

Scale 3_7 Identity Diffusion
References


Schwartz, S., Donnellan, et al. (In press).


**Websites:**

[www.forumea.org](http://www.forumea.org)

[www.ibavi.org](http://www.ibavi.org)

[www.ibavi.org/content/featured-projects](http://www.ibavi.org/content/featured-projects)

http://www.thebevi.com/docs/bevi_scale_pairwise_correlations_and_significance_levels.pdf