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Selected Identity Issues of Adolescence

- How does knowledge of one's adoption impact identity?
- Does immigration change one's sense of identity?
- Is a sense of one's ethnic identity critical to one's ego identity?

I believe that for minority youths, the need to discover their ethnic identity is a crucial prerequisite for discovering and developing their personal identity.

—Sophia, 19-year-old university student

This chapter examines some selected identity issues that may affect the identity-formation process among significant numbers of adolescents. It is only recently that research in the areas of adoption, ethnicity, unemployment, and residential relocation has been undertaken in relation to questions of adolescent identity. Most of these general issues in some way involve being different from many of one's peers. And although no two individuals

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who experience any one of the previous issues are likely to cope in the same way, this chapter will attempt to examine ways in which adolescents come to integrate (or not) a particular feature of "differentness" into their sense of ego identity. There are, of course, many additional issues faced by some adolescents that have an enormous impact on their identity development; however, space prohibits a full discussion of all such circumstances.

Furthermore, some adolescents will experience multiple levels of differentness or a combination of the selected identity issues previously cited. As Grotevant (1997b) has noted, the identity-formation process becomes increasingly complex as layers of differentness or special issues are added. Although the various sections of this chapter will address selected individual identity issues affecting some adolescents, it must be remembered that some adolescents face multiple levels of differentness.

Research on how adolescents come to integrate multiple levels of differentness into a sense of ego identity has been even more limited. For example, in Norway and Sweden, the majority of adolescents who have been adopted as infants and young children by Norwegian and Swedish parents come from outside of Europe, and in the United States, some parents will adopt children differing in ethnic origin. The adolescent identity-formation process for such individuals becomes even more complex, as both ethnic origin and adopted status must be integrated into a sense of one's identity. How these adolescents undergo the identity-formation process, adjusting to and integrating such varied levels of differentness, remains an open question in need of research.

Some of the areas previously mentioned are aspects of identity about which one has little choice. Previous chapters have focused on identity and decision making with regard to issues of vocation, ideological and relationship values, sex role values and forms of sexual expression—areas that allow considerable scope for choice in many Western, technologically advanced nations. As Grotevant (1993) points out, however, issues such as being adopted, being a member of an ethnic minority group, (arguably) being an immigrant, and/or being unemployed have an enormous impact on one's sense of identity yet may remain beyond one's power of choice. The variables of exploration and commitment have been useful in identifying different styles or approaches taken by adolescents to dealing with questions of psychosocial identity discussed in previous chapters, but are these variables useful in considering how nonchosen aspects of identity become integrated into one's personality? Grotevant (1993) argues that although one does not choose one's adoptive status, one does have considerable choice in how one comes to terms with being adopted. A similar argument could also be made for other nonchosen elements of one's identity—one does have considerable

choice in how one comes to terms with nonchosen circumstances affecting identity. This chapter will turn now to look at selected issues impacting the identity-formation process for special groups of adolescents.

Identity and Adoption

My first year of high school was a particularly bad time. I am adopted and I spent a lot of time thinking and feeling confused about who I was and that I didn't belong to my family. In my junior year, I spent more time out of class than in class and my grades reflected this. At one point that year, I left home for a month and went to stay at a friend's place. I remember around this time my attitude was really negative, and I seemed not to care about anything at all. All of this came as a bit of a shock to my parents, and they contacted the school counselor. All of this just confirmed to me that I was "mixed up" and not particularly nice to be around.

—17-year-old male high school senior

A number of factors may impact on the identity-formation process for adolescent adoptees. One involves the type of adoption procedure itself that is used in becoming a member of an adoptive family and the degree of openness children receive about their birth parents. Within the United States, there has been a good deal of controversy surrounding various adoption procedures and the effects such procedures may have on the adopted child. Wrobel, Ayers-Lopez, Grotevant, McRoy, and Friedrick (1996) have described the shifting continuum of adoption practices within the United States. This continuum has moved from complete confidentiality, in which any information about the identities of biological and adoptive parents was withheld from each other ("closed" adoption procedures), to a system allowing for varying degrees of indirect and direct contact between all parties involved (varying degrees of "openness"). A common middle-ground ("semiopen" procedure) has involved mediation by a third party, who communicates nonidentifying information between the birthmother and adoptive parents.

The clinical literature suggests that the most positive outcomes for adopted children and adolescents result when their adoptive parents provided them with information about their birth parents (e.g., Melina & Rosnia, 1993). Such procedures at least provide young adoptees with a sense of continuity in their life histories—a feature Erikson (1968) stressed as vital to the adolescent identity-formation process. Such procedures may also give

the child a greater understanding of the reasons for his or her adoption, which may help alleviate potential feelings of rejection.

Among adolescents who were adopted as children, both clinical and personal accounts point to a developmental sequence in how an individual comes to construct a sense of adoptive identity. Grotevant (1997a) has proposed that an initial state of unawareness or denial may be followed by disequilibrating experiences that can precipitate a crisis or exploration phase. Following this period of questioning, the realities of one's adoptive situation can be more fully integrated into one's sense of identity. This cycle may repeat itself several times over the life span. Similarly, Brodinsky (1987) has proposed an adaptation of Marcia's identity-formation model to suggest that adoptees may assume quite differential responses to identity questions. Some may struggle with, but ultimately resolve, issues of their adoptive identity (i.e., proceed through a moratorium to become identity achieved), whereas others may never seriously consider issues related to their adoptive position (i.e., remain identity diffuse). Or, one may accept their adoptive status but never seriously question one's origins (i.e., remain foreclosed). Both proposals have yet to be examined empirically, however. It may be that adolescents who lack information about their personal birth histories find the adolescent identity-formation process far lengthier and more complex than those nonadopted or adopted youths who have such knowledge of their personal birth histories.

It is when adopted children reach adolescence that most will develop more sophisticated cognitive capacities to think about the meaning of their adoption. Some research has directly investigated the relationship between adoption and identity among adolescents. Benson, Sharma, and Roehlkepartain (1994) found over one-quarter of adolescents who were adopted as infants said that adoption was a big part of how they thought about themselves. In addition, nearly half of adopted adolescents taking part in the survey reported thinking about their adoption at least two or three times per month or as frequently as daily. More recently, Kohler, Grotevant, and McRoy (2002) worked with a national sample of adolescent adoptees to address the question, "Which adopted adolescents are most preoccupied with their adoptive status?" Researchers found that those adolescents who experienced greater alienation from their adoptive fathers experienced high levels of preoccupation with their adoptive status. Those adolescents who were extremely preoccupied with their adoptive status reported significantly higher levels of alienation and lower levels of trust for both mother and father than adolescents with extremely low levels of preoccupation about their adoptive status. Thus, adoption status seems to play an important role in how a number of adopted teenagers view themselves as they work toward developing a sense of personal identity.

In terms of outcomes for identity development and mental health, a number of investigations have taken place. Hoopes (1990) summarized earlier adoption research to suggest that adoptive status, alone, is not associated with positive or negative identity resolutions among adolescents. Rather, many additional factors such as the ease and style of communication within the adoptive family and other personality and contextual variables seem to play key roles in the identity-formation process of adolescent adoptees. More recent research has supported this conclusion, even though a far greater variety of family configurations exist for adolescent adoptees today, including gay and lesbian households, stepfamilies, and extended families. Grotevant, Wrobel, van Dulmen, and McRoy (2001) examined the issue of social competence and engagement among adopted adolescents having differing levels of compatibility with their parents. Results showed that higher degrees of compatibility (as reported by parents) that were maintained over time from the primary school years through adolescence were associated with higher social competence and attachment, along with lower levels of problem behavior among the adopted adolescents. The results were similar for both male and female adolescents. Family functioning appears to be an extremely important variable in the identity-formation process of adopted adolescents.

A further issue for identity development among adolescent adoptees is whether the adoption is visible or invisible. Visible adoptions are those adoptions across ethnic groups, whereas invisible adoptions are those in which the ethnic origin of the child matches that of at least one of the adoptive parents. Although issues of biological origin most commonly mark the identity concerns of those young people in invisible adoptive situations, a concern with ethnic origin is the most common identity issue of those in visible adoptive situations (Irhammar, 1997). A survey of visible adoptees in Sweden found about one-third of young people take an active interest in their ethnic origins (Irhammar, 1997). Families of these youths were often uninterested in their child's ethnic origin, and the adoptee often felt a lower sense of self-esteem regarding his or her physical appearance. Conversely, an interest by the adoptive parents in their child's ethnic origin seemed to diminish the adoptee's interests in questions regarding his or her ethnicity.

International adoptions have become more commonplace in many countries over the past decades. In situations of visible difference between international adoptees and their new families, attitudes toward the child's ethnic group by the adoptive parents as well as by society more generally have been viewed as critical in the young person's ethnic identity development (Dalen & Sætersdal, 1992). In the United States, some research has found problematic mental health and low self-esteem to be common among children in visible adoptive situations (e.g., Gaber, 1994). However, children

in visible adoptive situations studied in Sweden and Norway who have assumed a Swedish or Norwegian self-identity have been shown to have a better mental health status than counterparts who have not assumed a Swedish or Norwegian self-identity (Cederblad, Hook, Irhammar, & Mercke, 1999; Dalen & Sætersdal, 1992). It may be that international adoptions are more commonplace in many countries of Europe compared with the United States, and that social acceptance in the new context may be strongly linked with adoptee adjustment during adolescence.

Assumption of a new national identity by international adoptees appears linked with optimal adjustment during adolescence. However, this process does not imply that internationally adopted young people have denied their ethnic origins. Cederblad and colleagues' (1999) research in Sweden found that those international adoptees who were engaged in questions of identity during adolescence and who felt mostly non-Swedish had more behavior problems; however 90 percent of the sample of adoptees felt mostly Swedish, and 70 percent of the sample felt no connection to their country of origin.

In the Netherlands, similar longitudinal research has been undertaken with internationally adopted children. Higher levels of behavior problems did appear among adopted versus nonadopted children and youths; again, however, the majority of international adoptees functioned quite well during adolescence. Indeed, internationally adopted adolescents in Italy actually perceived better communication with both parents than did biological adolescents; also, it was the adolescents from separated families who had more difficulties in relationships with parents than adopted or biological children of intact families (Lanz, Iafrate, Rosnati, & Scabini, 1999). Both the Swedish and Dutch studies previously noted that preadoption conditions experienced by the adoptees were strongly linked to behavior problems during adolescence. Extreme deprivation during early childhood for many of the international adoptees was as or more important than status as an international adoptee for mental health functioning during adolescence.

Finally, comment must be made on the prevalence of the searching for biological origins phenomenon among some adolescent adoptees. Much controversy has surrounded the extent to which curiosity about one's genealogy characterizes the identity-formation process for all adolescent adoptees. Some have proposed that curiosity about one's genealogy is more associated with particular personality traits an adolescent may hold, whereas others have argued that a search for information about one's past may be primarily associated with poor experiences in one's family of adoption. Recent longitudinal research is helping to clarify this matter.

From the Minnesota-Texas Adoption Research Project, Wrobal, Grotevant, and McRoy (2004) focused on the question of which adolescent

adoptees search for their biological parents and which adolescents do not as they begin to deal with issues of identity. Adopted adolescents most likely to search for biological parents were those who experienced some openness in their adoption, were least satisfied with that adoptive openness, and were most preoccupied with their adoptive status. Desire on the part of adolescent adoptees to search for biological parents was not related to family functioning or adolescent problem behavior. The issue of searching versus nonsearching is likely to change dramatically in coming generations, for many adoptions in the United States now enable direct contact between members of the adoptive and birth families from the outset (Grotevant, personal communication, 1998).

Section Summary and Implications

Providing adopted children with information about their birth parents is not problematic for identity development, according to research by Wrobel and colleagues.

Adoptive status, alone, is not associated with positive or negative identity resolutions among adolescents. Many additional factors such as ease and style of family communication within the adoptive family and other personality variables play key roles in the identity-formation process of adolescent adoptees.

Adolescent adoptees who are preoccupied with searching for their biological parents tend to be those who are preoccupied with their adoptive status, experienced some openness about the adoption process but were least satisfied with it. Family functioning and problem behaviors have not differed between searchers and nonsearchers.

Identity and Unemployment

Erikson (1968) has noted that it is the inability to find a meaningful vocation that most disturbs young people, and research reviewed in Chapter 4 indicates this to be still the case. Increasing levels of unemployment have characterized life in most Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries since 1990, and often, the rate of youth unemployment in these countries is some two to three times the rate of unemployment found within adult populations (Winefield, 1997). From U.S. Census data (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003), some 12.7 percent of youth in the 16- to 19-year-old age range in 2002 were unemployed; however,

rates were far higher among some ethnic minority groups. In this same age range and year, some 29 percent of African American and 17.7 percent of Hispanic youths were unable to find work in the United States. Between ages 16 and 24 years, about 2.6 million young Americans were out of work in 2002. Within Europe, a wide range of youth unemployment rates is present among OECD nations. Such unemployment rates for 15- to 24-year-olds have typically ranged from 6.6 percent in the Netherlands to 20–30 percent in France, Finland, Spain, and Italy, to more than 40 percent in Poland (OECD, 2004). In both Europe and the United States, rates of unemployment among youth in the 18- to 24-year-old age group are far higher than all other adult rates. And furthermore, all of these figures may underestimate the actual rate of unemployment among youths, for many stop looking for work after a period of time and are not registered as unemployed.

Many writers have pointed to the detrimental effects that unemployment or underemployment have on youth in particular. The identity-formation process is critically dependent upon matching one's own skills, talents, and interests with those required by the vocational context. Recognizing and being recognized as one "who counts" is an interactive process, dependent upon motivated youths and receptive contexts. Youth unemployment has been commonly linked with low self-esteem and negative feelings of psychological well-being and self-worth (Feather, 1990; Winefield, 1997)—a difficult base from which to enter the adult world.

Prause and Dooley (1997) point out that the job market does not just provide conditions of unemployment or employment. Rather, it also presents various intermediary positions of involuntary part-time employment and underemployment (defined as the underutilization of one's level of skills and/or educational background or inadequate monetary compensation for them). With many OECD countries undergoing economic restructuring, more workers are finding themselves underemployed as well as unemployed; the risk of underemployment for school leavers in the United States was rising faster than for adult workers (Prause & Dooley, 1997). Prause and Dooley noted that whereas unemployment is likely to be a transient state, underemployment is often of longer duration. Unemployment and underemployment are often both situations beyond an individual's control that nevertheless have important implications for the identity-formation process.

Youth unemployment is, to a large extent, associated with macrolevel factors within larger social systems as well as individual factors. Reasons for high levels of youth unemployment differ from one country to another, and unemployed youths themselves vary enormously in terms of their work ethics, social supports, and various personality factors (Gumbel, 2005; Meeus, Decovic, & Iedema, 1997). Among common causes of youth unemployment

may be the fact that many unemployed youths will be high school dropouts, and many employers require minimal levels of training and skill among their workers. Among the total number of unemployed youths in the United States in 2001, some 20 percent were high school *dropouts;* however, rates for unemployment among African American youths who were high school dropouts were far higher at 41 percent. Certainly rates of unemployment among high school *graduates* dropped to about 12 percent in the United States in 2001 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). Additionally, when minimum wages go up relative to the lower productivity levels of younger workers, many employers prefer to hire older workers with more general life experience. Also for steady jobs, employers may prefer to hire older workers where turnover rates are considered to be lower. Within a number of European countries, social entitlements following World War II provided generous safety nets for those who do not work; while current economic circumstances have changed, many of the post–World War II safety provisions have not. Thus, motivation may not be high among some youthful segments of the population to seek employment. Furthermore, practices such as high minimum wages in many countries make it unattractive for businesses to hire younger workers (Gumbel, 2005).

Following a review of a number of studies of youth unemployment, Fryer (1997) drew the general conclusion that mental health indices of those adolescents who become employed after leaving school diverge from those who become unemployed. Negative self-esteem and psychological distress have commonly been associated with unemployment after leaving school (e.g., Feather & O'Brien, 1986; Patton & Noller, 1990). Some debate, however, has surrounded the question of causation regarding youth unemployment; researchers have questioned whether poor mental health is the result of unemployment due to social circumstances or, rather, whether poor mental health itself leads to youth unemployment. This debate has been referred to as the social causation versus individual drift discussion. Fryer points out that economic conditions in the labor market must be considered when trying to integrate findings from studies of adolescents who become unemployed. In times of relatively low unemployment, individual factors are more likely to be associated with unemployment, whereas in times of high unemployment, the proportion of those whose mental health has deteriorated because they have become unemployed is likely to increase. However, Fryer cautions against a simplistic attempt to dichotomize forces responsible for unemployment and notes social causation and individual drift are usually inextricably intertwined.

Whatever the reasons for unemployment, adolescents seeking work who are unable to find suitable jobs face a number of latent consequences that are

likely to impact on identity development. These youths will often miss a clearly defined sense of purpose and structure in their daily lives; they will also miss participation in goals and purposes beyond themselves, and recognition by a significant reference group for personal status and accomplishments. Winefield, Tiggerman, Winefield, and Goldney (1993) pointed out that unemployment is a different experience for youths compared with adults. In a longitudinal study of youth unemployment, Winefield and colleagues found that unemployment may become a critical factor in determining a late adolescent's outlook on life; at this age, unemployment has an impact on so many aspects of one's social relationships. A youth's family support system, parental employment status, and geographical setting mediated such negative effects on relationships, however. One particular difficulty that long-term unemployed adolescents may face is the possible adoption of the identity of an "unemployed person." Such an identity resolution may seem all too tempting when one is struggling to find a sense of self within a particular social context that provides limited opportunities for vocational expression.

A number of factors may affect the way in which adolescents cope with unemployment. Understanding the reasons for their unemployment plays an important role in youth's identity development. Levine (1982) found that if youths see their unemployment as a result of external forces beyond their control, have confidence in themselves, and experience some academic or social success, identity will not be as threatened as it is for youths who attribute their unemployment to their own lack of ability. More recent research with unemployed late adolescents has found that youths' relational and work identities are affected differently by unemployment (Meeus et al., 1997). Their sense of relational identity did not seem related to employment status, but unemployment was strongly associated with their sense of vocational identity in this research. Furthermore, relational identity seemed to act as a buffer against psychological distress for those unemployed youths under study.

Many different avenues of approach have been taken to deal with youth unemployment in different countries. One common intervention effort in the United States, however, has been to target youths at risk for dropping out of school, because rates of unemployment for this group have been particularly high. Efforts to include vocational apprenticeship programs in the curriculum of many high schools to show youths the links between school and work have generally proven popular. Efforts have also been made with groups of potential school leavers to provide opportunities for community service, in principle helping better to integrate youths into the community and giving them opportunities to interact with adult role models. Studies on the impact of such community service programs have found increased self-esteem and

feelings of efficacy, decreased problem behaviors, and improved mental health more generally (e.g., Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Kielsmeier, 2000). A recent report on practices developing in some European countries, such as Denmark, requires unemployed youths to participate in job-training placement schemes in order to receive unemployment benefits; indeed, Germany now slashes unemployment benefits to youths who do not work or participate in such schemes (Gumbel, 2005).

Prause and Dooley (1997) have pointed out that youth employed in jobs in which they were dissatisfied and/or underemployed were as at risk in terms of various mental health factors as their unemployed counterparts. In a study involving three random samples of school leavers born in the United States between 1957 and 1964, these authors examined several groups of adolescents. These groups included the adequately employed, the unemployed, the involuntary part-time employed, the intermittently employed, and the inadequately employed (those in a poverty income group of recent school leavers). Several categories of underemployment seemed to retard development of self-esteem. When compared to the adequately employed, the unemployed *and* all underemployment groups showed lower levels of self-esteem, even when adjusted for earlier self-esteem measures taken at school and other variables such as aptitude, age, ethnicity, and parental years of education. Findings of this longitudinal study suggest that underemployment as well as unemployment is harmful to youthful workers' senses of self-esteem. The authors conclude that "thrusting young people into an unwelcoming economy may carry a social cost that we do not fully appreciate either in its magnitude or its duration" (Prause & Dooley, 1997, p. 258).

Section Summary and Implications

Mental health indices show lower self-esteem and higher psychological distress for those who become unemployed after leaving school compared with those finding work. Research suggests interventions that help youth attribute their unemployment to social rather than personal factors reduce the negative impact of unemployment.

Youths experiencing job dissatisfaction and/or underemployment are as at risk in terms of mental health factors as unemployed adolescents. Work training programs must stress preparing for employment that suits individual identity needs and interests rather than merely learning a random variety of useful skills.

Identity and Ethnicity

> *When my family first migrated here, our parents separated us*
> *from the majority culture largely because they knew so little*
> *about it. Physical appearance for us was always a barrier, too.*
> *Our mother strictly forbade us girls ever to date a "European*
> *boy," and with us living at home, she was easily able to do this.*
> *But last year I left home for university, and that was a year full*
> *of experimentation and exploration. I was curious to discover*
> *what I was doing here, and who I really was. I wanted my own*
> *set of morals and beliefs. Questions like "Where am I going?"*
> *and "Who will I become?" are still unanswered, but I feel cer-*
> *tain that I will one day find some answers. I think feeling com-*
> *fortable with my ethnic identity is a prerequisite to discovering*
> *my personal identity.*

—18-year-old female university student

Thinking about one's ethnic origin is not often a key identity quest among Caucasian North American adolescents; values in the home are generally similar to mainstream values for these adolescents, so concerns with one's ethnic identity often do not arise (Rotheram-Borus, 1993). However, for many adolescents of ethnic minority groups, ethnic identity concerns become central to the identity-formation process, as illustrated in the previous quotation. Phinney and Alipuria (1990), in fact, examined the ethnic identity search and commitment process for college students within three ethnic minority groups and one Caucasian comparison group. The researchers found that ethnic identity exploration was significantly higher among the three ethnic minority groups (Asian American, African American, and Mexican American) than the comparison Caucasian majority group. Furthermore, ethnicity was rated as significantly more important to overall identity by all minority groups compared with Caucasian college students. A number of more recent works also support this finding; ethnicity and, in turn, ethnic identity have appeared to be far more salient issues for ethnic minority adolescents than for those members of the ethnic majority (e.g., Branch, Tayal, & Triplett, 2000).

How does a sense of ethnic identity emerge? Erikson (1964) has noted that "true identity depends on the support that the young receive from the collective sense of identity characterizing the social groups significant to [them]: [their] class, [their] nation, [their] culture" (p. 93). Being a member of a particular ethnic group holds important identity implications. Young children are certainly aware of differences in ethnicity and culture. But it is

during adolescence, with capacities for reflecting on the past and the future, that one may develop a greater interest in one's own ethnic background. And it is during adolescence that one may have wider experiences within multicultural groups and experience ethnic discrimination. (More than three-fourths of subjects in Chavira and Phinney's [1991] study of Hispanic adolescents reported experiencing discrimination, and nearly 90 percent believed society held negative stereotypes of Hispanics.) Experiences of discrimination complicate efforts by adolescents to develop a strong sense of cultural pride and belonging. Spencer and Dornbusch (1990) have noted how adolescent awareness of negative appraisals of their cultural group can negatively influence the adolescent's life choices and plans for the future.

Growing up as a member of an ethnic minority group within a larger, mainstream culture additionally complicates the identity-formation process by providing alternative role models for identification to adolescents (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992). There may be conflicting values between the minority group and mainstream cultures, which require the minority group adolescent to choose in the identity-formation process. Such conflict of values has been particularly noted for Native American adolescents, faced with their minority culture's emphasis on tribal spirituality, freedom to experiment and operate semi-independently, and participation in ceremonies that may violate the school-attendance policies of the dominant culture (LaFromboise & Low, 1989). The statement from one of my New Zealand sophomore university students that follows describes the process she experienced in trying to find a sense of her own ethnic identity within the mainstream culture.

> *As a child, I was pretty insulated within the Chinese culture. But as I grew older, many of my Chinese peers went through an assimilation stage. They dressed and spoke as they perceived the majority to do—all because they wanted to be accepted. Physical appearance was a barrier; they felt like outcasts simply because they were not comfortable with themselves being Chinese. They tried to assimilate into the European culture, norms, and standards, but unsuccessfully, for their parents, like my own, were constant reminders of their ethnicity.*
>
> —19-year-old female university student

Phinney (1996) has defined ethnic identity as an enduring and basic sense of oneself that includes a sense of membership in an ethnic group, coupled with the attitudes and feelings of individuals in that ethnic group. For

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adolescents in any ethnic minority group, identity development is a more complicated task, involving decisions about the roles that two or more sources of identification will play in their own identity-formation process.

How does a sense of one's ethnic identity emerge? Several writers have posited stages in the ethnic identity-formation process for adolescents within various ethnic minority groups. In Cross's (1987) model, there is an initial *pre-encounter* stage in which individuals identify with the dominant culture. Although individuals here are aware of differences between themselves and the dominant culture, such differences are not considered to be important. In the next, *encounter* stage, adolescents come to experience discrimination, which leads to greater awareness of the cultural values present within their own ethnic group. At this time, they are likely to reject values of the dominant culture and strongly uphold those of their own ethnic group. Cross calls the next stage, *immersion,* in which young people strongly identify with values of their own ethnic group and may become politically active or even militant in rejecting the dominant society. However, through this stage, individuals may come to feel discontent with the rigidity of the initial immersion process and no longer find it necessary to reject everything from the dominant culture. In the final *internalization* stage, new recognitions emerge as people come to be appreciated more as individuals rather than as members of a particular ethnic group. Here, individuals experience a sense of fulfillment in integrating their personal and cultural identities. Although one still retains a sense of one's ethnic origins, a general attitude of tolerance and consideration of all people is present.

Phinney (1989, 1996) also suggests a stage model of ethnic identity development, based on Marcia's ego identity status framework. Although Marcia did not include the issue of ethnicity as a domain of study in his Identity Status Interview, Phinney has examined the variables of exploration and commitment with regard to the ethnic identity-formation process. In studies with adolescents from various ethnic backgrounds, Phinney has proposed a three-stage developmental process: unexamined ethnic identity, ethnic identity search, and achieved ethnic identity. These stages correspond to Marcia's diffuse/foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved identity statuses, respectively. These stages of ethnic identity development have correlated positively with measures of ego identity-status development. The stages are also found among adolescents of many cultural minority groups. Phinney (2003) considers that many contemporary adolescents of ethnic minority groups find resolution to questions of their ethnicity ultimately by adopting a *bicultural* identity.

How do adolescents of mixed minority and majority group parentage experience the identity-formation process? Research by Grove (1991) suggests the process may not be as difficult as one might imagine. In a study including

small samples of Asian, Asian/Caucasian, and Caucasian college students, the Asian/Caucasian group rated race as significantly less important to their sense of identity than did the Asian group. Results from Marcia's Identity Status Interview did not indicate significant differences in identity status distributions across the three ethnic groups. From qualitative accounts, Grove suggests that being partially Caucasian allowed those in the Asian/Caucasian group to question their Asian identity from a "safe place." In fact, being of mixed racial origins was often regarded positively by these students. Because they were not easily stereotyped by physical appearance, Asian/Caucasian students often reported feeling freer to choose their own ethnic identity commitments. Although this preliminary work with adolescents of mixed parentage suggests such teens may be less at risk than one might expect, research with larger samples of adolescents from different mixed ethnic origins is needed.

Self-esteem is one variable that has been studied extensively in relation to ethnic identity development. Phinney and Chavira (1992), for example, examined the relationship of ethnic identity to self-esteem. They found that self-esteem, especially among minority group students, was related to the degree of exploration and commitment around issues regarding their ethnicity. Those who had undertaken more extensive levels of exploration, followed by commitment with regard to their sense of ethnic identity had higher levels of self-esteem. Similar findings have emerged across a diversity of adolescent ethnic groups. Among Hispanic, African American, and Caucasian early adolescents girls, for example, ethnic identity was a significant predictor of global self-esteem (Carlson, Uppal, & Prosser, 2000). Smith, Walker, Fields, Brookins, and Seay (1999) examined relationships between self-esteem and ethnic identity among early adolescents in a diversity of ethnic groups. The investigators found that self-esteem and ethnic identity were distinct constructs that contributed to young adolescents' perceptions of their abilities to achieve in school, find meaningful work, and relate well to others in this process. And within a large sample of Mexican-origin adolescents attending three schools of varied ethnic compositions, Umaña-Taylor (2004) also found significant positive relationships between self-esteem and ethnic identity emerging in all three contexts. Furthermore, when generation and maternal education level were controlled, those attending a predominately non-Latino school reported significantly higher levels of ethnic identity than those attending either predominately Latino or balanced Latino/non-Latino school contexts. All of these studies point to the centrality that ethnic identity holds in the global identity development of ethnic minority youths.

Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) have provided suggestions for some specific interventions that may assist in promoting a sense of identity

achievement, ethnic group pride, and observable competence among ethnic minority group youth. Among their suggestions is finding methods to keep minority youth in school and academically oriented, because lack of education ensures future socioeconomic disadvantages for these teens. Also important are affirming constructive social networks and support systems for minority families and promoting the teaching of native languages in schools in an atmosphere of biculturalism. Additional suggestions are offering special training for teachers of ethnic minority students and offering a media-focused cultural emphasis that affirms ethnic group identity and group pride for all youths.

Section Summary and Implications

Growing up as an ethnic minority group member within a larger culture complicates the identity-formation process for many adolescents by the availability of varied role models holding possibly conflicting cultural values.

Ethnic identity emerges as adolescents experience a sense of difference. As a result, youths often immerse themselves in their own ethnic group values and reject the mainstream culture. Optimally, however, adolescents learn to integrate their own personal and cultural identities, achieving a sense of tolerance for and consideration of all people.

Steps to enhance ethnic identity might include finding methods to keep ethnic minority group adolescents involved with school and having schools that, in turn, promote an atmosphere of biculturalism.

Identity and Residential Relocation

When I was sixteen, I moved to [names city]. It was a huge change for me. I had to leave my friends, my school, my home, and my community behind. All of a sudden I found myself lost, and although I was with my family, I felt very lonely—sort of like a pariah. I was very unsure of myself and basically didn't know who I was and how I should be or act. After a few years at school, then teacher's college, then being a full-time worker I started to get to know myself through courses, reading books, and meeting people. I started to set goals for myself, relating to my future career and actually began to enjoy being the person who I was.

—22-year-old female, returning to university study

Geographic migration, whether within a county or across continents, raises important identity issues during the years of adolescence. Adolescents may undergo residential relocation for a variety of reasons, ranging from having upwardly mobile parents who wish to purchase a larger home to being forced to emigrate from homelands undergoing political turmoil or other forms of upheaval. Moving may involve a change of residence within the same city to a move between cities to a complete change of culture and traditions across national boundaries. Across all of these situations, however, the importance of "an average, expectable environment" has been stressed by Erikson (1968) as central to the identity-formation process of adolescence. Through such experiences, one ideally acquires a sense of inner sameness and continuity with one's past, which must be integrated into the present and the sense of identity that is forming. The reasons for residential relocation, magnitude of the contextual change, frequency of residential changes, age at the time of transition, and family supports available through the process are all extremely important variables to consider in understanding the impact that residential relocation may have on adolescents. However, this section will explore some of the many identity-related issues that a change of residence—in some of its many forms—may bring.

Several investigations have explored the identity-related impact of residential relocation on adolescents within the United States. Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford, and Blyth (1987) asked the question of whether or not an environmental change is more difficult if it coincides with other changes (such as pubertal development, change of school systems, early dating behavior, family disruption) in the transition to early adolescence. Results indicated that there were negative consequences for those early adolescents who made multiple changes at once. A family's residential mobility experienced at the very time an adolescent was entering puberty and changing the type of school system was associated with lowered self-esteem for girls, whereas both boys and girls experienced lowered grade point averages and more restricted extracurricular participation as multiple transitions increased. The authors proposed the need for some "arena of comfort" in at least some life spheres for such early adolescents.

These findings have been supported by more recent investigations into identity issues associated with residential relocation. For example, the type of family structure and family cohesion experienced by children and young adolescents experiencing residential relocation is an important mediator for identity-related outcomes of the experience. Tucker, Marx, and Long (1998) found that children and young adolescents who had experienced an average or above average number of residential changes in their lives appeared to

suffer no psychological ill-effects if they resided in families in which both biological parents were present; however, for children and early adolescents residing in single parent or reconstituted family structures, change of residence was associated with both behavioral and academic difficulties in school. Similarly, Crowder and Teachman (2004) found family residential mobility and neighborhood context to be important mediators through which one's family structure is associated with at risk behaviors among adolescents. Among adolescent women with premarital pregnancies, those living in solo, single-parent families at some time during adolescence had experienced almost twice as many residential relocations as those living in other family structures. (They also were exposed to neighborhoods with far higher levels of social and economic disadvantage than pregnant adolescents raised in other types of family structures.) Among school dropouts, the number of residential moves and level of neighborhood disadvantage increased sharply with increasing exposure to a solo, single-parent family structure during adolescence. Thus, family structure appears as a crucial mediator in the impact of residential relocation on adolescent social and academic behaviors. And work by Scanlon and Devine (2001) similarly found adverse associations between residential mobility and academic functioning and social well-being to be particularly high for poor children and adolescents living in single-parent families.

How has residential mobility been associated with feelings of well-being more generally during adolescence? Brown and Orthner (1990) researched the impact of recency of residential mobility and moving rate on early adolescents' feelings of well-being. Neither of these two mobility variables were associated with feelings of well-being among boys, but life satisfaction was negatively affected by the two mobility variables among girls. In addition, levels of depression were higher among those girls who had moved more frequently. The authors suggested that results may reflect the greater length of time taken by girls to develop a more intrinsic basis for their relationships with friends. Similarly, high rates of depression have been found among high-mobility adult women, but not high-mobility men, after controlling for social class, marital status, and employment (Magdol, 2003). In sum, residential relocation may be particularly disturbing to early adolescents, who are already adjusting to changes in physique, school setting, and friendship networks. Girls may be somewhat more vulnerable than boys in adjusting to residential relocation.

Among early adolescents, several researchers have also addressed the social implications for building a sense of identity that residential relocation involves. Vernberg (1990) found mobile adolescents of junior high age generally had fewer contacts with friends and reported less intimacy with a best friend. Furthermore, boys who had moved were more likely to experience

rejection by friends than nonmobile counterparts; this pattern was not in evidence for girls, however. Vernberg, Ewell, Beery, and Abwender (1994) also examined the sophistication of various interpersonal relationship skills of mobile early adolescents and their abilities to develop new friendships. Results suggested that the ability to coordinate social perspectives exerts a strong influence on the ability to make new friends following a move.

Another group of adolescents experiencing residential relocation are those who cross national and cultural boundaries and face the many demands that adjusting to a new culture, new patterns of communication and expectations, and possibly a new language brings. Bledin (2003) likens the experience of emigration to one of a separation-individuation process; emigration involves leaving behind both the external and internalized "motherland" (and often one's own physical parents in the homeland). For adolescent emigrants, the adolescent separation-individuation process (see Chapter 4) may be particularly complex when it is compounded with this additional "home-leaving" process. The new emigrant needs to resolve not only his or her adolescent separation-individuation issues, but also undergo the process of separation from the mother(land) in order to attain autonomous functioning in the new context. Bledin also suggests that the process for an emigrant of "bridging and arriving" in the new context can be facilitated by finding reference "groups of belonging" that provide a sense of place in the new environment.

However, it is finding such a reference "group of belonging" that can be a difficult task for immigrant adolescents in their new cultural settings. Qualitative work examining cross-cultural adaptation styles of immigrant youths from former USSR in Israel found themes of powerlessness punctuating the interviews of both male and female immigrant adolescents. From this study, males found it particularly difficult to function in a subordinate position with respect to peers in the Israeli context. They coped by retreating to their own ethnic groups and keeping interactions with host-culture peers to a minimum. Females were, by contrast, able to acknowledge and discuss their feelings of powerlessness more readily. This feat enabled them to cross cultural borders with Israeli peers more freely.

Attaining a sense of belonging to a peer group, which often holds social and cultural values contrasting markedly to those of an adolescent's immigrant parents, is a complex task for the immigrant adolescent. However, if attained, such social support and feelings of belonging do appear to act as a buffer against the many difficulties faced by immigrant adolescents. Assimilated Mexican American adolescents, for example, evidenced significantly fewer symptoms of depression than their nonassimilated peers (Cuéllar & Roberts, 1997).

Does emigration threaten one's sense of identity continuity? Ward and Styles (2003) examined the impact of multiple losses through the emigration process on identities of emerging adults as well as older women. These researchers were interested to learn if the loss of home, community, and social and cultural networks could threaten one's sense of identity and invoke a grief reaction. They were also interested to learn of strategies that might be used to buffer the impact of migration on one's sense of self. They found, in general, that reinvention of the self following emigration occurred over differing lengths of time for different people. The development of the self does not occur in isolation, and those emigrant women who worked through the grieving process to feel a sense of belonging in the new country were able to "reinvent" themselves using social strategies. However, those less able to adapt to new conditions used solitary strategies in trying to adjust. While the majority of participants experienced growth within themselves through the experience of emigration, not all reported a sense of belonging in the new context. This study highlights the importance of social context to identity formation and affirmation during adolescence that Erikson described many years earlier.

Vercrysse and Chandler (1992) were interested in coping strategies of American adolescents during their first year of living in a European country. Both approach and avoidance coping strategies were commonly used by these adolescents. (Adolescents generally use more approach than avoidance strategies.) The authors point out that these adolescents were unable to avoid geographical relocation as many adults can and therefore perceived relocation as an uncontrollable event. In so doing, they were more likely to avoid than approach that which they cannot control—hence the relatively common use of avoiding difficult situations. Teens with a higher self-concept and better behavioral adjustment tended to use approach strategies when dealing with stressors in the new situation, while those with lower self-concepts and behavioral adjustment avoided stressors in the new situations.

In many European countries, large numbers of immigrants are seeking refuge from political unrest or upheaval in homelands and/or a better future in the new locale; a similar phenomenon has also occurred within the United States. Within the United States, Goodenow and Espin (1993) point out that developing a firm sense of identity among immigrant adolescents seems to involve steering a course somewhere between refusing to adapt to American life at all and acculturating too quickly. In their case studies of Latin American immigrant adolescent women, initial language difficulties posed an important impediment to adapting to the new context at first, and the

resulting isolation from peers was particularly distressing to them. Negotiating different expectations in friendships and sex roles, in turn, brought new tensions in mother-daughter ties.

Within Europe, several empirical studies have addressed immigrant adolescent identity development in contexts undergoing rapid social change. Silbereisen and Schmitt-Rodermund (1995) examined the processes and outcomes of acculturation among ethnic German immigrant adolescents. Ancestors of these ethnic German immigrants had immigrated to countries within eastern and southeastern Europe some centuries earlier. With the change in political liberalization of Germany in the late 1980s, many such ethnic Germans returned to Germany, coming "home" as strangers. Silbereisen and Schmitt-Rodermund were especially interested in the timing of transitions to autonomy for ethnic German immigrant adolescents and the processes leading to their adaptation in a new land. They studied groups of settled immigrants, who had lived in Germany about one year longer than newcomers. Transition to assuming various aspects of autonomy by the newcomer adolescents was about three years later than the control group German counterparts; transition timetables for settled immigrants, however, were about one year closer to those of local German youths. Acculturation by immigrant German parents did not take place quickly, although settled immigrant parents allowed their adolescents more leeway from parental supervision than did newcomer parents. Peer involvement was an important factor in the acculturation timetables for transition to more autonomous functioning by both groups of immigrant adolescents.

Section Summary and Implications

Residential relocation may be particularly problematic for early adolescents, who are already adjusting to changes in physique, school structure, and friendship networks. However, being a member of an intact family acts as a buffer for many risk factors associated with residential relocation.

Receiving social support from significant others as well as having a reference "group of belonging" is associated with reduction in the negative impact on self-concept and identity that a move may bring.

Adolescent immigrants may best develop a firm sense of their own identity by steering a course between refusing to adapt to the new context at all and acculturating too quickly.

Back to the Beginning

This chapter began with three questions and a quotation from Sophia, a 19-year-old female university student who felt that the need to discover her ethnic identity to be a crucial prerequisite for discovering and developing her personal identity. For many adolescents facing special identity issues, it is sometimes the need to discover their own particular minority group roots or response to a situation of difference that may be a prerequisite to resolving other important identity issues of adolescence.

Answers to Chapter Questions

◈ **How does knowledge of one's adoption impact identity?**

Providing children and adolescents with information about their birth parents does not have negative consequences for their identity development. Other factors such as the ease and style of family communication and personality factors of parents who have adopted are more important to adolescent identity formation than knowledge of one's adoptive status alone.

◈ **Does immigration change one's sense of identity?**

Optimal identity formation among adolescents who have immigrated involves developing a sense of personal identity that integrates elements from ones identifications and experiences in different cultural settings. So yes, immigration does require changes in one's sense of identity.

◈ **Is a sense of ethnic identity critical to one's ego identity?**

For many adolescent members of an ethnic minority group who live within a larger, mainstream culture, integrating a sense of ethnic identity within one's sense of ego identity is a critical task. Ethnic identity has been positively linked with self-esteem.

PART III

Adulthood

To truly meet others with whom to share a "We," one must have a sense of "I."

—Erik Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*
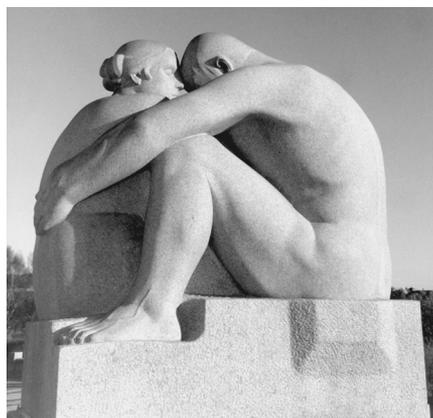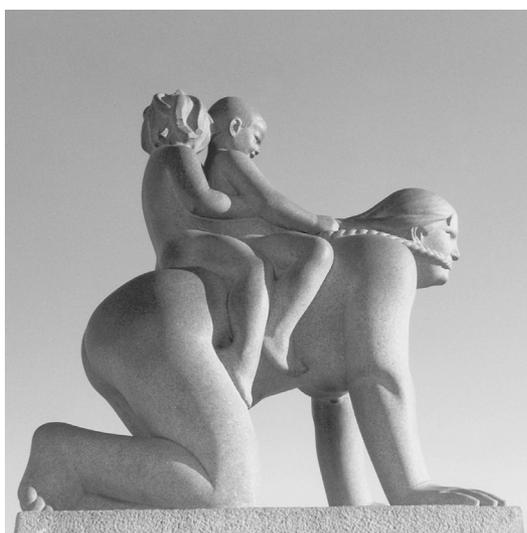
Now, in my late 20s, I sometimes stop to wonder about my life.

—28-year-old female nurse