

Identity Formation and Emerging Adulthood
 or
Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I headed?
CCCA 2010

1. Why this is a critical issue?
 - A. Identity formation, the internal sense of who a person is and how they interact with the world, is THE primary developmental issue of late-adolescence and young adulthood.
 - B. Our affluent, late-modern, individualistic culture makes this an increasingly difficult task.
 - C. Those serving today's college students have a significant opportunity to stand in the gap.

2. What is IDENTITY?

A. **DOMAINS OF IDENTITY**

1. MEANING: Epistemological: "How do I know what is true, fulfilling, valuable?"
2. PURPOSE: Intra-personal: "Who am I and Why am I here?" worldview, values, priorities—career, religion etc
3. RELATIONSHIPS: Interpersonal: "How do I related to others and the world?"
 (Baxter-Magolda, 2004)

B. **TWO PROCESSES:** Exploration and Commitment (Marcia, 1989).

Exploration: significant period of searching and disequilibrium and must be supported and propelled by significant others yet fully owned by the individual for effective formation.

Phases of the developmental journey: absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing.

Commitment: acceptance of specific goals, values, beliefs, roles.

		Lo	Commitment	Hi
Exploration	Hi	Moratorium	Achieved	
	Lo	Diffused	Foreclosure	

These are not stages people move thru but "states".

- Achieved: stable/healthy. Not-threatened.
- Foreclosure (does not consider other options). Appears acceptable/healthy in collective societies but can be judgmental and closed in individualistic societies.
- Moratorium: exploration is expected prior to achieved but not healthy if permanent.
- Diffused:

C. **TWO FOCI:** Internal/personal process AND an external/social

1. **INTERNAL:**

a. **Attitude/disposition towards learning/growth:**

- Normative: conform to prescriptions and expectations of significant others

- Information Seeking: actively confront identity issues by evaluating self-relevant information
 - Diffused/Avoidant: low in self-awareness and avoid dealing with identity issues (Berzonsky, 1989)
- b. **Abilities/Resources:** moral and critical thinking abilities, supportive/challenging people and environments, purpose of life understanding. (Cote, 2002)
2. **EXTERNAL:** “Individuals are influenced by cultural factors and social roles, with varying degrees of pressure to fit into the available identity ‘molds’ created by these influences” (Cote, 2002, p. 8).
- a. Social norms and values
 - b. Rites of Passage: crisis that creates tension and disequilibrium. Results in new levels of expected responsibility/roles.
 - c. Community based: models—mentors—mirrors
3. The Challenge and Opportunities for Today’s Emerging Adults: Our culture has removed the molds and structures that ‘empower’ movement towards commitment.
- A. Late-modern culture has shifted towards individualistic relativism, removed the societal structures and guidance that facilitate identity formation and provided financial support to allow extended exploration; resulting in ‘extended adolescence’ and new developmental stage called ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnette/ Tanner, 2006).
 - B. Difficulties of identity formation in this generation: uncertainty about what to believe in; uncommitted to any course of future action; open to influence and manipulation; unaware of the role of passing a sense of meaning on to the next generation; and a lack of self definition rooted in a community of others (Cote, 2002).
 - C. Affluence, freedom from responsibility and a plethora of opportunities facilitate extended exploration for some. Lack of resources and hopelessness trap others.
 - D. Collapse of family and disconnection for cross-generational community: 70% of ‘20-somethings’ who grew up in church leave it during or after college. (Rainers, 2008/Unchristian).
 - E. What does college do anyway? Content not character. Transmission not transformation. Expect high levels of responsibility in an environment with high levels of freedom—overnight! Getting a job...not.
 - F. Dis-embodiment and dis-incarnation: role of technology in the iY generation. (Elmore)
 - G. Emerging adulthood characterized by: identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and hopefulness (Arnett and Tanner, 2006). Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (Smith, 2005)
 - H. Extreme examples: ski bum, Starbucks “internship”. Gap year before college is now gap years after college.
4. The Opportunity: **Interventions** that assist emerging adults form a sense of who they are.
- A. Examples: purposeful programs, ceremonies at passage moments (baptism/confirmation, off to college, marriage), social expectations re-instated (sub-culture based).
 - B. Create a **safe & challenging** place for exploration! CHALLENGE v SUPPORT
 - C. Basic human need to answer the core questions: Who am I? Why am I here? How do I related to the world? Meaning, Purpose, Relationships.
5. Questions, thoughts, responses, discussion.