Introduction

In his classic work, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, Erikson (1959) proposed a psychosocial theory to account for human development across the lifespan. Through the use of the term “psychosocial,” Erikson broadened contemporary views of development to include a person’s social and cultural contexts as major influences on development. He also departed from his contemporaries by moving the field away from a psychodynamic perspective of development – a narrowly focused perspective wherein one’s personality is established during childhood and does not change thereafter – to a broader conceptualization that viewed development continually unfolding throughout the life cycle (Meeus, 1992). According to the psychosocial framework, a person’s life course can be divided into eight qualitatively distinct stages. During each stage, individuals face a core developmental conflict and the extent to which they succeed in resolving this conflict determines the likelihood of transitioning smoothly to subsequent developmental tasks.

To illustrate Erikson’s psychosocial theory, the first stage, “trust versus mistrust,” revolves around the newborn infant acquiring a stable representation of the world. In the earliest stages of life, an infant is entirely dependent on their caregivers. Caregivers provide food, warmth, change the infant’s diapers, cuddle them, and respond to vocalizations of distress. As these initial experiences evolve over time, the quality of the caregiver-infant relationship becomes the infant’s first mental representation of the world. From this sense of mutuality, the infant gains its first understanding of its “self” providing it with a rudimentary sense of *identity* that is carefully honed through life experiences and provides a foundation of
social interactions, stored in memory and that will eventually guide the infant’s future. When caregivers respond to the infants’ vocalizations and provide the desired warmth, nourishment, and physical contact, infants develop stable and positive representations of the world. These initial “cycles of learning” provide a sense the world can be trusted, and that it is safe. Conversely, infants whose basic needs are not met with regularity and comfort develop a sense of “mistrust;” one that eventually fuels anxiety, fussiness, and irritability. The lack of mutuality and the daily inconsistencies that abound between caregiver and infant eventually give way to feelings of hopelessness.

As important as the early stages in Erikson’s theory are to later development, this chapter concerns the stage of identity versus role confusion, which Erikson used to characterize the powerful crossroads that youth face during adolescence and the transition to adulthood. Youth begin to traverse various paths in life and to search for personal meaning. Major decisions that youth face during this time revolve around exploring and beginning to pursue their educational and vocational ambitions. Many youth use their adolescent friendships as a springboard to lifelong friendships and encounter their first experience with romantic attachments. The period marked by adolescent yearnings is also the start of a long process of formulating a plan filled with wishes and desires that will help many youth fulfill their life’s dreams. Hesse (1951) used his literary character Siddhartha to capture the endless cycle of human self-discovery that begins in adolescence and suggested that the major achievement of this period revolves around spiritual enlightenment and solving the “riddle of the self.” Through the process of formulating an identity, youth poignantly ask “Who am I?” and “Who will I be when I grow up?” These efforts are all part of the enduring search for self, which according to Erikson represents a critical developmental task.

Considerable research suggests that the quest for identity is initiated in part by massive biological and pubertal transformations (see Susman & Dorn, 2009, for a review), cognitive
growth (i.e., the acquisition of the formal-abstract reasoning; cf. Lehalle, 2006, for a review), and increased social awareness (i.e., an expanded peer network, greater emphasis on sexuality along with reconfigurations in parent-adolescent relationships, cf. Laursen & Collins, 2009; and Brown & Larson, 2009, for reviews). Whether taken individually or together, these transformative changes lead adolescents to view themselves in uniquely different ways. The major task of the adolescent period, as well as of the transition to adulthood, is to weave together these disparate psychological forces and construct a personal identity (Kroger, 2004). Whereas the psychosocial work of childhood revolves primarily around internalizing parental and societal standards, adolescence involves rethinking these positions, developing new personal roles, testing new emotional and psychological boundaries, beginning for formulate a life plan, and setting individual goals (Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijzers, & Branje, 2012).

Erikson viewed identity as a continuum ranging from synthesis, or a set of self-determined ideals, to confusion, or an inability to derive a self-determined set of ideals, with the “ideal” identity located somewhere in the middle of these two endpoints (Schwartz, 2001). Individuals successfully resolving this stage could combine and integrate relevant earlier identifications into a unique personal sense of self, thereby arriving at a sense of coherence within one’s identity. Those who do not successfully resolve the identity crisis, remain in a state of role confusion – where the individual is unwilling or unable to adhere to a synthesized set of goals, values, and beliefs, and instead “jumps” from one set of commitments to the next. This constant shifting is sometimes referred to as “psychological tourism” (Palmonari & Crocetti, 2011, p. 71). Such psychological tourism may occur either because the person experiences difficulty sustaining a set of roles or because s/he is not interested in forming long-lasting commitments (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, & Vansteenkiste, 2005).
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Identity and Individual Adjustment

Considerable research suggests that the extent to which adolescents successfully develop a coherent and structured sense of identity exerts a strong influence on psychosocial and relational adjustment (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Indeed, a consolidated sense of self serves to guide one’s life pathways and decisions (Kroger, 2007). According to Adams and Marshall (1996), an identity fulfills five functions. First, identity provides individuals with a sense of structure within which to understand self-relevant information. Second, identity provides a sense of consistency, coherence, and harmony between and among one’s chosen values, beliefs, and commitments. Third, identity provides individuals with a future orientation and with a sense of continuity between the past, present, and future. Fourth, identity provides goals and direction through commitments and chosen values. Finally, identity offers a sense of personal control that enables active self-regulation in the process of setting and achieving goals, moving toward future plans, and processing experiences in ways that are self-relevant (e.g., Berzonsky, 2011; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005).

As this chapter examines in considerable detail, a substantial body of empirical evidence indicates that adolescents who achieve a stable identity are more likely to be protected from various forms of risk behaviors including alcohol use, illicit drug use, and unsafe sexual behavior. Conversely, youth who struggle to reach their personal goals and who experience stress associated with a lack of meaningful commitments may be more vulnerable to engage in delinquent acts (Schwartz, Beyers, et al., 2011).

Family and Identity Development

More than a century ago, prominent writers such as James (1890) and Cooley (1902) suggested that individuals obtain a great deal of personal and reflective information by interacting with significant others. Cooley (1902) coined the term “looking glass self” to refer to the reflective process through which individuals gauge both their self-worth and their value
to the world. Erikson (1968) endorsed this metaphor and conceptualized identity development as occurring at the intersection between the individual and her/his social environment. The need to experience and balance individuality and belongingness is a requirement for developing a healthy and adaptive sense of self and identity (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Erikson, 1968; Koepke & Denissen, 2012). The need for belongingness, on an interpersonal level, is developed through frequent positive contact with other people and through stable and reliable parent-child relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Many of the social interactions that guide the developing self have their roots in the family context, leading Cooley (1909) to state that the family is “fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of the individual” (p. 25). Parent-child relationships provide constant feedback on the self, and this feedback can either enhance or detract from one’s psychosocial development (Schachter & Ventura, 2008). Not only does family represent the first context in which individual development occurs, but it strongly influences how individuals will experience other important contexts (i.e., peers, adult authority, and school), as well as the process and content of identity development (Scabini & Manzi, 2011).

Consistent with the themes outlined in this book, parental socialization strongly impacts identity formation. Based on analyses of parents’ stories of their childrearing, Schachter and Ventura (2008) found that parents shape their children’s identities by (1) conveying what they believe to be good and proper expressions of self, (2) actively engaging themselves with their children and altering their own personal goals to best fit the needs of the child, (3) remaining informed about their child’s development within the larger social context, and (4) adopting their own goals and parenting strategies rather than simply rehashing memories of their own parent-child relations.

Parents shape their child’s identity through the ways they build trust and foster attachments. As defined within the framework proposed by Bowlby (1979, 1982), attachment
refers to a deep-seated emotional tie that individuals form with their primary caregivers. From an evolutionary point of view, newborns and young infants who stay close to their caregivers have a much better chance of survival when facing imminent threat or danger. Over the years, this definition of attachment has broadened to include other developmental periods and other attachment figures (Buist, Dekovic, Meeus, & Van Aken, 2004). Leading scholars in the field of attachment, including Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978), have posited that attachment security refers to expectations of relationship security based upon the internalization of child–parent interactions. The attachment between a child and a caregiver is optimized when the attachment figure (the object of the attachment) provides physical proximity, a safe haven, and a secure base from which one can explore the world (Bowlby, 1982). This portrayal of attachment resonates well with Erikson’s psychosocial concept of basic trust versus mistrust. An individual’s unique attachment history gives rise to what Bowlby termed an “internal working model of self and others” (Bowlby, 1973; Rholes & Simpson, 2004). The internal model of others informs the child as to whether attachment figures are expected to be dependable (positive) or insensitive, neglectful, or abusive. Likewise, the internal model of self informs the child as to whether s/he is lovable (positive) or unworthy of love (negative; Bowlby, 1980; 1988). This first conception of self as lovable or unlovable may serve as the earliest precursor to one’s sense of identity. Furthermore, although Bowlby’s (1979) particular emphasis was on the attachment bond that a young child forms with primary caregivers, he stressed that attachment behavior characterizes human beings throughout the lifespan. Internal working models continue to evolve with new relationships throughout life, and these working models may continue to feed into a child’s early sense of identity.

Moreover, in developmental terms, secure attachments serve as a prerequisite for guilt-free and shame-free exploration (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Indeed, Bowlby (1979) argued
that a secure sense of attachment, or the knowledge that one or more trusted people will come to one’s aid when needed, is important for exploration at any age. Accordingly, the identity literature has suggested that secure attachments promote a secure base from which adolescents will feel free to explore the environment (Marcia, 1989). The secure attachment bond between parent and child communicates a sense of acceptance which allows for the freedom to try on new roles and make independent choices and decisions while being able to count on parents for support (Beyers & Goossens, 2008; see also Chapter 8, this volume).

Recently, studies using Erikson’s identity framework have focused on additional components of parent–child relationships and have provided some empirical support linking positive family functioning and identity development. For instance, longitudinal studies have found that parental involvement and communication, as well as family cohesion, in early adolescence are positively predictive of identity coherence and negatively predictive of identity confusion (Reis & Youniss, 2004; Schwartz, Mason, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2008). Further, the link between family functioning and identity becomes increasingly bidirectional over time during adolescence (Schwartz et al., 2009).

The Identity Status Paradigm

Erikson’s (1950, 1968) model of identity formation was strongly rooted in his clinical observations, such that his writing was heavily descriptive and theoretical. Although this emphasis provided a rich and expansive perspective on human development generally and on identity formation specifically, the lack of precision and empirical focus made it difficult to operationalize his basic concepts of psychosocial development (e.g., Côté, 1993). Marcia (1966) was among the first writers to provide a concrete empirical foundation to Erikson’s concepts. He suggested that adolescents engage in at least two key formative processes as part of identity formation; exploration (active questioning and weighing of various identity alternatives) and commitment (which entails adhering to a set of goals, values, and beliefs)
Marcia derived four identity statuses based on a combination of these two identity processes, where an identity status represents “an individual’s style of coping with the identity crisis” (Marcia, 1967, p. 119). Specifically, in the achieved status, youth have made a commitment following a period of active exploration; in the foreclosed status, adolescents have made a commitment with little or no prior exploration; in the moratorium status, adolescents are actively exploring various alternatives and have not yet made a commitment; and finally, in the diffused status, adolescents have not engaged in a proactive and systematic process of exploration, nor have they made a commitment.

Although some researchers (e.g., al-Owidha, Green, & Kroger, 2009) have suggested that the identity statuses might represent developmental stages, potential sequences among the identity statuses have been strongly criticized for two primary reasons. First, the statuses operate at least somewhat independently within a variety of content domains, and often a person may be in one status in Domain A, but in a different status in Domain B (Goossens, 2001). For instance, an adolescent might have clearly and actively defined her identity in the educational domain, choosing an academic program of study that fits with her abilities and aspirations, but she might have internalized personal religious orientation from her parents and other authority figures. This adolescent would be classified as identity achieved in the educational domain and identity foreclosed in the religious domain. Second, longitudinal research suggests that the identity statuses may be largely stable over time (Meeus et al., 2012), and that the majority of young people do not switch statuses.

Parent-Adolescent Relations and Identity Statuses

A significant body of research has examined the influence of parent-child relations on identity statuses within the framework of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1988). Given that a secure attachment is a prerequisite for the exploration of the external environment, identity researchers have suggested that attachment should foster ongoing exploration of
identity alternatives (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). However, studies on the relationship between attachment and identity have yielded somewhat contradictory findings (Meeus, Oosterwegel, & Vollebergh, 2002). Although several studies point to a positive link between attachment to parents and identity development (Anderson & Fleming, 1996; Kendis & Tan, 1978), others have not confirmed these linkages (Kroger, 1985; Kroger & Haslett, 1988; Matos, Barbosa, De Almeida, & Costa, 1999). These observed differences may be due to the different approaches to measuring attachment, gathering data from different reporters (e.g., parents, peers, teachers), and the developmental period under study. Studies examining attachment relationships in terms of positive family processes (e.g., cohesion, communication, involvement, support) have generally found positive effects of family attachments on identity exploration and commitment (e.g., Meeus et al., 2002) and on decreases in identity confusion (Reis & Youniss, 2004; Schwartz, Mason, et al., 2009).

Recent meta-analytic work indicates that secure attachment was mainly associated with the identity achieved status, and the lowest levels of attachment were observed among diffused individuals (Årseth, Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2009). Specifically, findings aggregated data across six studies indicated that 54.9% of adolescents in the achieved status were characterized by a secure (strong) attachment, compared to only 22.6% of youth in the diffused status. Similar findings emerged in a short-term longitudinal study by Zimmerman and Becker-Stoll (2002). Patterns for foreclosure and moratorium, in terms of attachment profiles, have been weaker and less consistent than those for achievement and diffusion. Not surprisingly, achievement and diffusion are closely parallel to Erikson’s concepts of identity synthesis and identity confusion, respectively (Schwartz, Beyers, et al., 2011).

**Identity Statuses and Problem Behaviors**

Despite considerable expansion of the identity status literature, little empirical work has examined identity status in relation to a wide range of problem behaviors. The small numbers
of studies that have examined relations between identity status and problem behaviors have produced inconsistent findings. To illustrate, Jones and Hartmann (1988) found that diffused high school students reported the highest level of cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use; foreclosed youth reported the lowest levels; and adolescents in the achieved and moratorium statuses reported intermediate levels of use of these drugs. In contrast, Bishop, Macy-Lewis, Schnekloth, Puswella, and Struessel (1997) found that diffused first-year college students reported the highest annual alcohol use, but that foreclosed youth were also relatively heavy drinkers. Jones, Hartmann, Grochowski, and Glider (1989) examined relations between identity status and drug use comparing youth in a residential substance abuse treatment center and a matched school-based sample. They found significant differences between the two groups on achievement (higher in the school sample) and foreclosure (higher in the treatment sample). Notwithstanding, Nelson, Padilla-Walker, and Carroll (2010) did not find significant associations between identity status analyzed in various domains (i.e., religion, values, family, and dating) and drug use in a sample of young adults attending a religious university. Similarly, Frank, Jacobson, and Tuer (1990) found that occupational identity status was unrelated to alcohol consumption in male and female young adults, and Spruijt, De Goede, Iedema, Maas, and Duindam (1999) reported that identity was only weakly associated with drug use in a Dutch sample of adolescents and emerging adults.

To summarize, research on identity status and externalizing problem behaviors suggests that youth characterized by a diffused identity status appear more vulnerable to problem behaviors. The lack of a coherent or synthesized identity structure observed in the diffused status (Schwartz, Beyers, et al., 2011) may prevent adolescents and young adults from delaying gratification and from avoiding hedonistic behaviors that are harmful to one’s health. However, the full range of studies on this topic is quite limited, and there does not appear to be a conclusive set of findings. Indeed, Schwartz (2005) has raised these and other
concerns, including the absence of methodologically rigorous studies that would suggest clear patterns of cause and effect.

Recent Extensions of the Identity Status Paradigm

The identity status model has inspired a great deal of theoretical and empirical work, but it also has been the target of considerable criticism (Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Côté & Levine, 1988; van Hoof, 1999). A primary criticism of the identity status model is that the statuses provide an extremely limited portrait of the identity development process and thereby underrepresent Erikson’s theory. For example, the combination of two processes (exploration and commitment) may not be sufficient to capture the range of potential identity configurations. This critique has prompted the introduction of additional subtypes of commitment and exploration, as well as the identification of new identity statuses not originally proposed in Marcia’s model (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Meca, & Ritchie, 2012). These newer models have included the three-factor dimensional model (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijsers, Schwartz, & Branje, 2010) and the dual-cycle model (Luyckx, Goossens, Beyers, & Soenens, 2006; Luyckx et al., 2008). Within measures designed based on these models, each component process is assessed separately, and identity status assignments are carried out using cluster-analytic procedures (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, & Meeus, 2008; Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, & Vansteenkiste, 2006).

The Three-Factor Dimensional Model

Meeus, Crocetti, and colleagues (Crocetti et al., 2008; Meeus et al., 2010) proposed a three-factor identity model aimed at capturing the dynamic processes through which identity is formed and modified over time. This expanded model takes into account three pivotal identity processes: commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment. Commitment refers to enduring choices and intentionality that individuals have enacted with regard to various developmental domains and to the self-confidence they derive from these
choices. It serves as an indicator of identity certainty or consolidation, and of successful identity development (cf. Schwartz, 2007). In-depth exploration represents the extent to which individuals think actively about the commitments they have enacted (e.g., reflecting on their choices, searching for additional information, talking with others about their commitments). Reconsideration of commitment refers to identity uncertainty – the comparison of present commitments with possible alternatives because the current ones are no longer satisfying.

The conceptual foundation for reconsideration of commitment is, on the one hand, similar to Marcia’s (1966) definition of exploration, as it encompasses the investigation of possible new commitments in various life domains, such as education, career, relationships, lifestyle, etc. On the other hand, the concept of reconsideration differs from exploration in that it taps into adolescents’ present attempts to change commitments that do not fit into their standards, values, aspirations, and abilities. Thus, reconsideration of commitment represents an evaluation of various alternatives that starts with present commitments, rather than from a lack of commitment as originally hypothesized by Marcia. In contrast to Marcia’s identity status model, the revised three-factor identity status model suggests that an individual approaches adolescence with a rudimentary set of commitments in several domains and can decide to maintain or to revise them (Meeus, 2011; Meeus et al., 2010). Not surprisingly, reconsideration is predictive of psychosocial and health outcomes reflecting a sense of uncertainty, such as internalizing symptoms and a fragmented sense of self (Schwartz, Klimstra, et al., 2011; Schwartz, Klimstra, et al., 2012).

The three-factor model attempts to capture the dynamic psychological processes underlying Erikson’s psychosocial model of identity synthesis versus role confusion. Specifically, adolescents explore their commitments in depth, evaluate them for overall fit (i.e., the identity formation and maintenance cycle), and if not satisfying, reconsider them in
favor of other new and perhaps untested commitments (i.e., the identity revision cycle).
Commitment and reconsideration are conceptualized as the two opposing forces – certainty
and uncertainty – within this dynamic process.

The Dual-Cycle Model

The dual-cycle model (Luyckx et al., 2006) separates the identity development process
into two distinct cycles by subdividing identity exploration and commitment into two
processes apiece. The first cycle focuses on the process by which commitments are formed
and includes exploration in breadth and commitment making, referring to Marcia’s
exploration and commitment dimensions. In the second cycle, commitments are evaluated
through exploration in depth (thinking and talking to others about commitments that one has
enacted) and, as a result, the individual may embrace these commitments and integrate them
into one’s sense of self, leading to identification with commitment. On the other hand, if
one’s commitments are judged to be unsatisfactory, a new round of exploration in breadth
(sorting through multiple identity alternatives) may ensue.

In addition, because identity is a life-long process, even commitments with which one has
identified may later be explored in depth as a result of normative changes (e.g. getting
married, having children, graduating college) or non-normative changes (e.g., death of a
loved one, loss of a job, divorce; Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Beyers, & Missotten, 2011).
Moreover, to explain the paradoxical association of the moratorium status both with openness
and curiosity and with anxiety and depression, Luyckx et al. (2008) added ruminative
exploration to the dual-cycle model as a fifth process. Ruminative exploration represents
being “paralyzed” by unrealistic expectations, maladaptive perfectionism, and fear of making
the “wrong” choice (Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008; Luyckx, Soenens, Goossens, Beckx, &
Wouters, 2008). In summary, the dual-cycle model recognizes that identity development is a
fluid and dynamic process that emerges out of the interplay between commitment formation and commitment evaluation.

Identity Profiles

Consistent with Marcia’s identity status framework based on commitment and exploration, both the three-factor dimensional model and the dual-cycle model have provided empirical support for an expansion of Marcia’s identity status paradigm. Using cluster analytic techniques, Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, and Meeus (2008) extracted five statuses from continuous measures of commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration (see Table 5.1). The study not only replicated all four of Marcia’s original identity statuses (i.e., achievement, foreclosure [relabeled as “closure” or “early closure” by Meeus et al., 2010], moratorium, and diffusion) but also extracted an additional variant of the moratorium status, labeled searching moratorium. Whereas the traditional moratorium cluster consisted of individuals who were uncommitted and were searching for commitments, the searching moratorium cluster was comprised of adolescents who were searching for new commitments without discarding their existing commitments. These two moratorium statuses differ in terms of the base from which reconsideration is attempted. Unlike the classical moratorium status, searching moratorium involves exploring from a secure base provided by one’s current commitments.

---- Insert Table 5.1 about here ----

Using their dual cycle model and cluster analytic methods, Luyckx et al. (2008) extracted all of Marcia’s original identity statuses as well as differentiating between two distinct types of diffusion (see Table 5.2). The first variant is labeled troubled diffusion or diffused diffusion, where the person attempts to explore in breadth, but worry and rumination soon take over and the person cannot sustain the exploration long enough to make commitments.
The second variant, *carefree diffusion*, refers to cases where the person is unconcerned with identity issues and is happy to be uncommitted.

--- Insert Table 5.2 about here ----

**Parent-Adolescent Relations and Extensions of the Identity Status Model**

Empirical research has documented that warm parent-adolescent relations, characterized by trust and communication, are characteristic of the high-commitment statuses – achievement and foreclosure/early closure (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, & Meeus, 2008, Crocetti, Schwartz, Fermani, Klimstra, & Meeus, 2012). The family emotional climate, which nurtures interpersonal relations and supports the adolescent in making decisions and life choices, helps her or him develop a coherent and clear sense of self. In contrast, problematic family relations, characterized by low trust and poor communication, are associated with doubt and shame, constant self-examination and questioning of one’s ambitions and life purpose, low self-esteem, and an inability to enact or sustain firm decisions about one’s goals, values, and beliefs. Adolescents who cannot count on supportive family relationships are more likely to be uncertain about their own identity and to continue considering and reconsidering various identity possibilities.

In formulating their dual-cycle model, Luyckx et al. (2006) examined the relationship of family attachment with commitment making, identification with commitment, exploration in breadth, and exploration in depth. Luyckx et al. found that a supportive, nurturing parent-child climate was associated with higher levels of commitment making, exploration in depth, and identification with commitment. In addition, results indicated that commitment making was negatively associated with emotional separation from parents while exploration in depth was negatively associated with both emotional and functional separation. On the other hand, exploration in breadth was found to be positively associated with functional independence. Further, Luyckx, Soenens, Goossens, and Vansteenkiste (2007) found that parental
psychological control (conditional acceptance based on compliance with parental wishes) inhibited exploration in depth. Taken together, these findings indicate that emerging adults who reported feeling close to their parents, or who felt that their parents did not value them unconditionally, were less likely to explore in breadth and were more likely to have made commitments – likely those perceived to be preferred by parents.

Beyers and Goossens (2002) examined the prospective, longitudinal effects of paternal and maternal parenting (defined as responsiveness, behavioral control, psychological control, and autonomy support) on identity formation. With regard to the commitment formation cycle, parenting quality was found to positively predict both exploration in breadth and commitment making. Moreover, Beyers and Goossens mothers tended to discourage broad exploration, and that fathers seem to discourage commitment making. With regard to the commitment evaluation cycle, no parenting effects were detected. However, identification with commitment and exploration in depth were found to be predictive of supportive parenting later on. More recently, Luyckx et al. (2007) examined indirect effects of parental control on autonomy support and academic adjustment as mediated by identification with commitments. Results indicated that autonomy-supportive parents who do not employ psychologically controlling techniques were better able to facilitate the development of self-initiated and authentic goals, as well as a capacity for making choices in identity-relevant domains, in young college attending adults.

Identity Status Extensions and Problem Behaviors

The three-factor model. Research examining the three-factor model provides a framework from which to understand the relations between identity and externalizing problem behaviors in early and middle adolescence. Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, and Meeus (2008), for instance, used cross-sectional data to illustrate that reconsideration of commitment was significantly and positively related to reported delinquent behaviors, such as
vandalism, stealing, and drug use. Klimstra, Crocetti, Hale, Kolman, Fortanier, and Meeus (2011) examined identity formation in juvenile delinquent boys residing in a penitentiary and compared their behavior to clinically referred boys and to adolescents from the general population. They found that identity processes in the juvenile delinquent boys differed significantly from the comparison youth. Juvenile delinquents reported lower commitment and greater reconsideration. Juvenile delinquents were underrepresented in the achieved status and overrepresented in classic moratorium status. In a five-wave longitudinal study with two cohorts of adolescents (i.e., early-to-middle and middle-to-late adolescents) of a general community sample, Meeus et al. (2012) found that individuals adolescents in the moratorium and diffused statuses reported higher levels of delinquency than their counterparts in the achievement and early closure statuses.

**Dual-cycle model.** With regard to the dual-cycle model, Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, and Beyers (2006) found that commitment making was significantly associated with lower levels of alcohol and marijuana use in late adolescences. With regard to exploration variables, Luyckx and colleagues found that exploration in breadth was associated with higher levels of drug abuse. These findings further highlight the need to distinguish between the two exploration dimensions and between the two commitment dimensions.

Schwartz, Beyers, et al. (2011) found that emerging young adults in the carefree-diffused, diffused-diffused, and searching-moratorium statuses were most likely to report smoking marijuana. However, with regard to more dangerous substances such as hard drugs, inhalants, injecting drugs, and misusing prescription drugs, young adults in the carefree diffused status were 2–3 times more likely to engage in these behaviors compared to individuals in any of the other statuses. In addition, 20% of participants in the carefree diffused status had engaged in sex with strangers or brief acquaintances, and more than 30% of participants had driven while intoxicated, during the 30 days prior to assessment. Conversely, in the same study,
Schwartz, Beyers, and colleagues (2011) found the achieved and foreclosed statuses to be associated with lowest levels of engagement in health-compromising behaviors, especially illicit drug use and impaired driving.

Findings highlight that, although ruminative exploration is associated with distress and risk taking, identity commitment is associated with lower levels of maladaptive outcomes including drug use. In a recent study with young adults, Ritchie et al. (in press) found that commitment (indexed using composite scores of commitment making and identification with commitment) and exploration (as measured by composite scores of exploration in breadth and in depth) were related to decreased likelihood of engaging in illicit drug use indirectly through well-being. Ruminative exploration, on the other hand, was directly associated with lower levels of well-being, and indirectly with higher likelihood of engaging in illicit drug use. Taken together, results from both extensions of the identity status model provide evidence that maladaptive identity configurations may lead to engagement in risky behaviors.

The Identity Styles

One of the primary extensions of the identity status model has been identity style (Berzonsky, 2011; Schwartz, 2001). Drawing on Kelly’s (1955) constructivist tradition, an extensive body of research has developed within the identity literature viewing the individual as an intentional agent who participates in the construction of his or her intrapersonal and social world (Berman, Schwartz, Kurtines, & Berman, 2001). Viewed through a constructivist lens, successful identity development is marked by being proactive in making identity-related choices – through forming and testing hypotheses in a rational and dispassionate manner (Grotevant, 1987). Consistent with this perspective, Berzonsky (1989) introduced identity style, a social-cognitive framework, to index the way in which an individual typically processes, organizes, uses, and revises information related to the self (Smits, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyckx, & Goossens, 2010).
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Berzonsky proposed three social-cognitive styles, including informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant styles (Berzonsky, 2004a; Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994). An individual applying an informational identity style will actively explore, maintain flexible commitments, and seek and utilize self-relevant information when faced with important life choices. Those applying a normative style will avoid dealing with information that may conflict with self-conceptions by turning to authority figures, will not explore in breadth or depth, will conform to the expectations of others and/or reference groups, and will develop and adhere to rigid and dogmatic commitments and stable self-conceptions. Finally, individuals with a diffuse-avoidant identity style are characterized by avoiding identity-related choices and by a situation-by-situation approach to life. Although some diffuse/avoidant individuals do engage in exploration, it is often disorganized and haphazard.

Although most individuals have the ability to use all three identity styles by late adolescence, research suggests that both the normative and informational styles are generally more adaptive than the diffuse-avoidant style (Berzonsky, 1990; Berzonsky, 2011). In contexts where self-determined decision making is advantageous or required, the informational style may be more adaptive than the normative style (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000). Moreover, research has also indicated that diffuse-avoidant youth procrastinate and avoid conflict or making decisions (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 2009). Diffuse-avoidant youth lack commitments, do not manifest self-awareness, respond to life choices or dilemmas with emotion-focused strategies (e.g., denial, wishful thinking, and tension reduction), and allow immediate gratification or situational demands dictate their choices. In contrast, youth employing an informational style apply their mental resources and are effortful, evaluative, and deliberative (rational) as they gather self-relevant information. They are cognitively complex, self-aware, and tend to suspend judgment as they engage in self-construction. Youth utilizing an informational identity style use problem-focused strategies, are open-
minded, goal directed, apply self-management skills, and seek out alternatives when making decisions. Individuals utilizing a normative style cannot tolerate ambiguity, appear closed, and require externally imposed structure. Berzonsky and Luyckx (2008) suggest that normative processing may be automatic (i.e., an implicit or intuitive approach) and underlies defensive or rigid reasoning and lack of self-reflection.

Identity Styles and Identity Development

Prior to reviewing how identity styles are intertwined with parenting and delinquency, it is worthwhile considering how identity styles are related to other identity conceptualizations discussed in this chapter. Relations between identity styles and identity statuses are among the most consistently replicated findings in the identity literature. Indeed, several studies have demonstrated that the informational style is positively associated with identity achievement and moratorium, the normative style is strongly related to foreclosure, and the diffuse/avoidant style is positively related to diffusion (Adams, Berzonsky, & Keating, 2006; Krettenauer, 2005; Schwartz, Mullis, Waterman, & Dunham, 2000). Findings indicate that individuals who use either informational or normative styles are most likely to form strong commitments. However, information-oriented individuals choose their commitments after having explored various identity alternatives, whereas normative oriented individuals are more prone to choosing their commitments based on the advice of significant others, without considering other alternatives.

Researchers have also found an association between identity styles and strength of identity commitments (e.g., Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005). In particular, normative individuals possess significantly higher levels of commitment than their informational and diffuse-avoidant counterparts. Informational youth, in turn, have significantly stronger commitments than their diffuse-avoidant peers. Recent studies (Crocetti, Rubini, Berzonsky, & Meeus, 2009; Zimmermann, Biermann, Mantzouranis, Genoud, & Crocetti, 2012) investigated
associations between identity styles and the three identity processes from the three-factor model (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Meeus et al., 2010). Scores on the informational style subscale were positively associated with in-depth exploration and moderately related to commitment. Scores on the normative style subscale were positively correlated with commitment and moderately correlated with in-depth exploration. Diffuse-avoidant subscale scores were negatively associated with commitment and in-depth exploration, and positively associated with reconsideration of commitment. These results provide further evidence that the informational and normative styles are associated with adaptive identity development, whereas the diffuse-avoidant style is associated with confusion and difficulty establishing commitments.

**Parent-Adolescent Relations and Identity Styles**

A number of studies have examined how family dynamics are related to identity styles (see Berzonsky, 2011, for a review). These studies have focused on various dimensions of parent-adolescent relationships and their interconnections with identity styles. Generally speaking, empirical evidence suggests that the normative style is associated with close family relations, whereas the diffuse-avoidant style is associated with poor family functioning. The patterns of associations between the informational style and family relations are less clear. In particular, Berzonsky, Branje, and Meeus (2007) examined the role that adolescents’ perceptions of parent-adolescent relationships may play in the development of differences in identity style and evaluated the mediating role of identity style in the relations between perceived parental behaviors and psychosocial resources in a sample of early adolescents. These authors found that parents’ soliciting information from adolescents (e.g., asking them what they have been doing) is positively related to the informational style; parent-adolescent communication is positively linked to the normative style; and adolescent disclosure to parents is negatively associated with the diffuse-avoidant style. Further evidence indicates
that the identity styles mediate, either partly (for parental communication) or completely (for parental solicitation and adolescent disclosure) the associations of family functioning with identity commitment and self-control. Interestingly, associations between the styles and self-regulation indicated that a normative style appeared to be relatively more adaptive than an informational style: normative scores were positively linked with self-regulation, whereas informational and diffuse-avoidant scores were negatively associated with effective self-regulation. Thus, contrary to findings of previous studies using late adolescent samples (e.g., Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005), an informational style was negatively associated with self-regulation in early adolescence. This pattern of associations suggests that a normative style may be most adaptive in early adolescence, where the primary task is to reduce confusion and decide on a general direction for one’s life. It is possible that early adolescents employing an informational style attempt to obtain too much diverse or novel information before they can fully grasp the complexity of this information.

Crocetti, Cherubini, and Palmonari (2011) examined the relations between perception of social support from significant others (i.e., father, mother, brother/sister, best friend, teacher), identity styles, and identity commitment in high school students. Results indicated that the level of perceived support received from brother/sister, best friend, and teacher is positively associated with the informational style; the level of perceived support received from father, mother, and teacher is positively related to the normative style; and the level of perceived support received from mother is negatively associated with the diffuse/avoidant style. These findings suggest that when adolescents utilize a normative style of processing, they rely mainly on adult support; whereas youth who engage an informational style rely more strongly on support from their peers.

Studies that have examined relations between family functioning and identity styles using samples of emerging-adult college students (e.g., Dunkel, Papini, & Berzonsky, 2008;
Matheis & Adams, 2004; Smits et al., 2008) further confirm the key role that positive family relations play in defining adolescents’ identity styles. In particular, Berzonsky (2004b) examined associations between different typologies of parenting and identity styles. An authoritative parenting style was positively associated with both the informational and normative identity styles, and negatively related to the diffuse-avoidant style. An authoritarian style was positively linked with both the normative and diffuse-avoidant styles. Parental permissiveness was positively related to the diffuse-avoidant style.

**Identity Styles and Problem Behaviors**

Several studies also highlight the role of identity styles in adolescent adjustment (Berzonsky, 2011). In particular, the diffuse-avoidant style is linked to both externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors: it is associated with conduct problems and hyperactivity (Adams et al., 2001), delinquency (Adams, Munro, Munro, Doherty-Poirer, & Edwards, 2005), disordered eating (Wheeler, Adams, & Keating, 2001), depressive symptomatology (Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi, & Kinney, 1997), neuroticism (Dollinger, 1995), and hopelessness and low self-esteem (Phillips & Pittman, 2007). The informational and normative styles are negatively linked to delinquency (Adams et al., 2005), symptoms of conduct problems and hyperactivity (Adams et al., 2001), and hopelessness (Phillips & Pittman, 2007). Furthermore, both the informational and normative styles are positively related to self-esteem (Nurmi et al., 1997; Phillips & Pittman, 2007) and psychological well-being (Crocetti & Shokri, 2010; Vleioras & Bosma, 2005).

Using a national sample of Canadian adolescents, Adams et al. (2001) found that the diffuse-avoidant style is positively associated, and the informational and normative styles negatively associated, with symptoms of conduct problems and hyperactivity. In another Canadian national sample, Adams et al. (2005) examined the association between identity styles and delinquency (i.e., drug and alcohol use, property damage, and violent crimes) in
7th through 12th graders. Adams et al. (2005) reported that the diffuse-avoidant identity style was associated with higher self-reported delinquent behaviors, whereas the informational and normative styles were linked to less self-reported delinquency. White and Jones (1996) examined whether identity styles were related to personal, educational, and criminal history in a sample of state prison inmates. Inmates with a diffuse orientation were characterized by early involvement in criminal behavior, greater total number of arrests, lack of education, and greater likelihood of parole violation. Inmates with an informational style were also relatively young when they first engaged in criminal activity, but they reported half as many total arrests, greater levels of educational attainment, and fewer incidents of parole violation. Normative-oriented inmates were distinguished from the other identity style groups by their relatively late involvement with drugs and the criminal system.

In sum, the literature on identity styles and problem behaviors suggests that adolescents who rely mainly on a diffuse-avoidant style are more likely to endorse problem behaviors. Diffuse-avoiders are primarily concerned with how they appear to other people and are more likely than normative or informational youth to base their sense of self-identity on popularity and reputation. If this is the case, diffuse-avoiders might engage with deviant peers as a way of enhancing their reputation (e.g., Emler & Reicher, 1995 and see also, Vega, Apospori, Gil, Zimmerman, & Warheit, 1996).

Concluding Remarks and Suggestions for Future Research

In this chapter, we have reviewed a diverse literature examining the intersection of parent-child relations, identity, and problem behaviors. In doing so, we took into consideration several different identity conceptualizations rooted in Erikson’s psychosocial developmental theory. These models included Marcia’s identity status paradigm and three extensions of the identity status approach – the three-factor process model, the dual-cycle model, and the identity style model. Drawing from these different perspectives, we can
conclude that warm and supportive parent-child relations promote the development of a coherent sense of identity, which in turn protects against externalizing problem behaviors, drug use, and other personally and socially destructive outcomes. Although our review indicates a fairly consistent pattern of findings, more work remains to be done in this area. We outline some of these future directions here.

First, we emphasized relations between family functioning and identity formation. Within each of the different conceptualizations of identity, consistent evidence suggests that family relationships characterized by a secure attachment, trust, open communication, support, cohesion, and closeness promote the development of a coherent sense of identity. In fact, positive parent-child relations are linked to decreased identity confusion, to stronger identity commitments, and to higher likelihood of having an achieved or foreclosed/early closed identity. Furthermore, close parent-child relationships promote an informational style and, even to a stronger extent, a normative style, which in turn promotes the development of identity commitments. However, less well understood is the extent to which the effects of parenting on identity development are equivalent between Western and non-Western contexts (Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx, & Zamboanga, in press). Indeed, the agency and self-direction underlying an informational style may be less appropriate in non-Western contexts where conformity and imitation serve as the primary mechanisms for developing a sense of identity (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001).

Second, we attended to links between identity formation and problem behaviors. The most consistent finding from this literature is that identity instability is associated with problem behaviors. Identity confusion, low commitment coupled with high reconsideration of commitment, the diffused and moratorium statuses, and the diffuse-avoidant style were all related to problem behaviors. However, there was some degree of inconsistency across groups. In general, studies that involved adolescent samples reported reliable associations
between identity and problem behaviors. Those studies that relied on emerging adults (primarily college students) produced somewhat less consistent findings. One potential way to address these inconsistencies, and to develop a more internally consistent understanding of the effects of identity on problem behavior, may be to utilize alternative designs that compensate for age differences, either in the form of a longitudinal-cohort or longitudinal-cohort-sequential design to capture the influence that age may have both on identity and delinquent involvement. A second concern that may contribute to the observed differences in the findings is the way investigators defined problem behaviors. Use of a wide range of drugs, including cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use – and in some cases hard drugs like cocaine and heroin – were sometimes used to index problem behavior. Some studies were able to detect significant relations between identity and drug use, whereas others did not find these same relations. In some cases investigators chose to sum across conduct problems, arrests, and use of various substances to create a single index of externalizing problems. Such an approach may increase statistical power but may also sacrifice the ability to discern individual relations between identity constructs and specific problem behaviors or drug types. The wide array of potential outcomes and heterogeneity of findings in the literature suggests that we use caution in interpreting these findings. A final concern is that the literature has maintained a larger emphasis on well-being and internalizing behaviors, with far less attention to externalizing behaviors. It is our hope that this chapter will inspire more empirical work on the relations between identity and externalizing problem behaviors.

Third, there is considerable evidence to suggest that family relations are associated with identity, and that identity is related to problem behaviors. However, most of this evidence relies on cross-sectional data. In fact, there is a dearth of longitudinal studies tapping reciprocal relations between family, identity, and problem behaviors over time. The few available studies (see, for instance, Schwartz et al., 2009, for connections between family
functioning and identity confusion; and Buist et al., 2004, for relations between parental attachment and externalizing problem behaviors) support the conclusion that these relations may be reciprocal. However, more longitudinal studies are needed to identify directions of effects, potential causal processes, and the extent to which identity dimensions may mediate the effects of family processes on externalizing behaviors.

Fourth, in this chapter we have focused on a specific line of identity research that emphasizes the literature on personal identity. Specifically, aspects of self-definition that focus on an individual’s overall “life story” (McAdams et al., 2006) include one’s goals, values, and beliefs (Marcia, 1966). However, the term “identity” refers to a number of different perspectives on what identity is, how it comes into being, and what processes or contexts influence it. Broadly, three different levels of identity have been proposed: personal, relational, and collective (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). As Vignoles, Schwartz, and Luyckx (2011) have concluded, the identity literature could benefit from integration of these three identity frameworks. Such integration could significantly improve our understanding of factors that contribute to adolescent deviance and could draw upon a fuller range of social experiences that comprise the adolescent and emerging adult worlds.

Finally, although the present review has largely painted a picture of the interaction or concurrent associations between numerous variables of parental involvement and the development of a consolidated sense of self and identity, the need for a more dynamic perspective on identity development has been highlighted in the literature (Koepke & Denissen, 2012). From a developmental systems approach, the emergence of new structural and functional properties is the consequence of multiple interactions among various developmental processes (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2007). These levels range from the biological level, through the psychological level and the social relational level, to the sociocultural and biochemical levels, as well as the built environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Szapocznik &
Coatsworth, 1999). Future research should seek to paint a more dynamic approach that views identity development as an emergent property of transactions between individuals and their environments. As a starting point, Koepke and Denissen (2012) have emphasized that the incorporation of new, identity-relevant information from these transactions depends on the openness and flexibility of the person’s identity at any particular point in time.

In contemporary Western societies, there is evidence that the identity formation process is becoming more and more challenging. In these highly industrialized, fast-paced economies, many youth are strongly pressed to find their own unique identity by choosing among an increasing variety of lifestyle options, creating a situation colloquially referred to as the “tyranny of freedom” (Schwartz, 2000). The current chapter has highlighted the critical role family functioning plays on the development of a sense of self and identity and in turn, the role that identity may play in determining the person’s risk for problematic outcomes. We hope that the present chapter will continue to inspire more and more innovative work elucidating these and other patterns of associations and effects.