

# *IDENTITY AND AGENCY IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD: Two Developmental Routes in the Individualization Process*

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*The study of emerging adulthood—the prolonged transition to adulthood extending into the 20s—is a rapidly growing area of research. Although identity issues are prominent during this period, the role of personal agency and individualization in the identity formation process during these years is not well understood. This study examines three psychological aspects of identity formation (style, status, and process) in relation to personal agency associated with the individualization process. Structural equation modeling analyses suggest that higher levels of agency are positively related to exploration and flexible commitment, unrelated to conformity, and negatively related to avoidance. Cluster analysis was used to examine and support a theorized polarity between developmental and default forms of individualization. Replicated across three U.S. ethnic groups, the results suggest that emerging adults utilize agentic capacities to varying degrees, and that the degree of agency utilized is directly related to the coherence of the emerging adult's identity.*

**Keywords:** agency; identity; emerging adulthood; ethnicity

**During the past half-century,** the transition to adulthood has become increasingly prolonged in virtually every postindustrial society (Arnett, 1998; Shanahan, 2000). Young people in these societies now stay in school longer, marry later, and have their first child later than they did in the past (e.g., Arnett & Taber, 1994; White, 2003). Because the

postindustrial transition to adulthood can last from the late teens until at least the mid-20s, it has been proposed that these years now constitute a potentially new and distinct developmental period, called *emerging adulthood*, between adolescence and adulthood. Use of this term is becoming increasingly widespread (e.g., Arnett, 2000; Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Hagan & Foster, 2003), and efforts are under way to better understand the developmental antecedents and consequences of emerging adulthood (Arnett & Tanner, in press).

In the theory of emerging adulthood proposed by Arnett (2000, 2004), identity issues have a prominent role. When studying the potential origins of this new period, it is useful to consider the sociological observation that the array of life alternatives available to emerging adults (e.g., career paths, romantic attachments, and worldviews) has expanded, but that the collective support for identity formation has decreased (Côté & Levine, 2002). Accordingly, if emerging adults are to make enduring life commitments (e.g., romantic commitments, career choices) by the end of their 20s, they must first undertake the psychological task of individually forming a stable and viable identity that can guide and sustain these commitments. Some emerging adults may find the developmental task of prolonged identity formation difficult without external guidance or help. At the same time, however, others may capitalize on the extended transition to adulthood and the resulting opportunities to explore identity issues beyond high school—opportunities that previously were available primarily to those from affluent backgrounds. Taken together, the unstructured nature of emerging adulthood, the vast array of potential identity choices, and the lack of external guidance (a) have made identity development a personal project for many emerging adults and (b) may require the exercise of agency in negotiating the passage to adulthood.

In an attempt to better understand emerging adulthood as an opportunity for identity development, the purpose of the current study was to investigate the relationship of individualization and agency to identity formation in emerging adulthood. Moreover, given the increasing ethnic diversity in the United States (Day, 1996), we also sought to examine whether this relationship would be consistent across three prominent U.S. ethnic groups (non-Hispanic Whites, non-Hispanic Blacks, and Hispanics). The current study drew on a number of related but heretofore unconnected literatures: the developmental literature

on emerging adulthood, the sociological literature on agency and individualization, and the social-psychological literature on identity formation.

#### **INDIVIDUALIZATION AS A PRIMARY TASK OF EMERGING ADULTHOOD IN POSTINDUSTRIAL SOCIETIES**

The transition to adulthood has become increasingly prolonged as a result of economic changes, and many aspects of the life course have also become increasingly preference based as a result of cultural changes (e.g., Wallace & Kovatcheva, 1998). In most Western societies, market-oriented policies and consumption-based lifestyles are replacing community-oriented policies and production-based lifestyles (e.g., Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Consequently, life-course events that were once more normatively structured (e.g., marriage, gender roles, religious beliefs) are increasingly left to individuals to decide on their own, leaving people to take on new responsibilities for living with the consequences of their actions and decisions, for good and bad (Bauman, 2001; Beck, 1992). As a result, emerging adults are increasingly required to “individualize” their life courses in general, and their identities in particular, by taking the initiative to form working and personal relationships, to gain educational credentials and employment experience, and to plan for the future. Emerging adults who address these issues in a proactive and agentic manner may be most likely to form a coherent sense of identity that can then be used to guide their life paths and to negotiate for social resources and positions. On the other hand, emerging adults who adopt more passive or procrastinatory approaches may have trouble forming coherent identities, and the resulting lack of identity coherence may prevent them from taking full advantage of the opportunities presented within affluent but unstructured Western societies.

The individualization of the life course appears to vary in a number of predictable ways based on the degree of agency or self-direction that the emerging adult possesses. For example, at one extreme, emerging adults can exercise the choice to pursue a life course totally devoid of traditional social markers by selecting a number of so-called default options made available by consumer-corporate society and mass culture, by which they follow paths of least resistance and effort,

as in the imitation of the latest fashion and music trends of contemporary youth culture, to the exclusion of more demanding activities. This pathway is referred to as *default individualization* because it involves a life course dictated by circumstance and impulse, with little agentic assertion on the part of the person (Côté, 2000). Individuals adopting a default individualization strategy may therefore ignore (or fail to create) opportunities for self-improvement in areas such as higher order competency refinement, human-capital skill accumulation, and credential acquisition. Such a strategy may leave the person unprepared to make the decisions and to address the important issues that arise in emerging adulthood and that prepare the person to successfully undertake adult roles such as marriage, fulfilling employment, and parenthood (cf. B. Schwartz, 2000, 2004).

Alternatively, emerging adults can now pursue life courses based on extensive deliberations of the alternatives and opportunities available—given the decline of traditional social markers and of economic barriers involving gender, ethnicity, and social class—in pursuit of stimulating and liberating possibilities. This pathway is termed *developmental individualization* (Côté, 2000) because it involves a life course of continual and deliberate growth (cf. Evans & Heinz's, 1994, concepts of passive and active individualization). Developmental individualization involves pursuing opportunities that lead to self-improvement in a variety of intellectual, occupational, and psychosocial areas as well as selecting life courses based on extensive exploration of available alternatives. Therefore, because it implies the exercise of agentic capabilities, developmental individualization may help to prepare emerging adults for the decisions and problems that they will have to address as they prepare to undertake adult roles.

#### IDENTITY FORMATION IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD

One of the most striking features of emerging adulthood is that it represents an extension of Erikson's (1968) psychosocial moratorium, the period during which youth are free to explore potential identity alternatives without having to assume permanent adult commitments. Overall, for Erikson, the identity stage is potentially a time to enhance ego capacities, such as agentic abilities and strengths, and to master difficulties and obstacles presented by the social environment.

Again, however, net of social-structural obstacles, the success of the psychosocial moratorium for any given individual is likely influenced by the extent to which she or he adopts a strategy consonant with developmental individualization (Côté, 2002). Individuals adopting a default individualization strategy may miss out on the identity-formation opportunities provided by the psychosocial moratorium during the emerging adult period.

At this point, it is not clear how the experiences of non-college emerging adults compare with those of college-attending emerging adults in terms of key elements of identity formation. Without the psychosocial moratorium afforded by the university setting, less identity exploration might take place, especially among those whose role in the workforce is marginal. Concerns have been raised about the “forgotten half” of emerging adults who do not attend college. For the forgotten half, incomes have dropped some 20% to 30% in the past 2 decades (Halperin, 2001), and the lack of advanced credentials can constitute a serious career obstacle. On the other hand, it is possible that other forms of identity exploration take place. Unfortunately, existing data sets do not allow us to examine how the individualization process differs between these two segments of the population; however, we can assume that some forms of default and developmental individualization take place in both.

*Perspectives on identity formation.* A number of empirically oriented perspectives have attempted to extend and operationalize Erikson’s (1950) theory of identity formation (see S. Schwartz, 2001, for a review). These include the identity status paradigm (Marcia, 1966) and identity-processing orientation (Berzonsky, 1989). Marcia reviewed Erikson’s (1950, 1968) extensive writings on identity and extracted the seemingly orthogonal dimensions of exploration and commitment. By juxtaposing high and low levels of exploration with high and low levels of commitment, Marcia derived four identity statuses: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. Briefly, diffusion (low exploration, low commitment) represents apathy and disinterest in identity issues; foreclosure (low exploration, high commitment) represents rigidity and conformity in identity formation; moratorium (high exploration, low commitment) represents the active search for a sense of self; and achievement (high exploration, high commitment)

represents the consolidation of various self-elements into a coherent and integrated identity. Identity achievement and diffusion may be taken to represent the two endpoints of Erikson's (1950) unipolar dimension of identity versus identity confusion (Côté, 1984; S. J. Schwartz, 2002). More extensive reviews of identity status theory can be found in Berzonsky and Adams (1999), Waterman (1999), and van Hoof (1999).

To expand on the processes encapsulated in identity status theory, Berzonsky (1989) proposed three identity-processing orientations. Drawn from Kelly's (1955) person-as-scientist viewpoint, identity-processing orientation represents the ways in which individuals interpret and approach identity-related issues and dilemmas. Individuals utilizing the *informational* orientation tend to consider multiple alternatives and to adopt an open-minded approach when faced with identity-related decisions. Individuals utilizing the *normative* orientation tend to conform to social and familial expectations, and to seek closure as soon as possible, when confronted with identity-related life choices. Individuals utilizing the *diffuse/avoidant* orientation tend to procrastinate or avoid confronting identity-related decisions.

Berzonsky (1989; Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994) has examined the empirical association between the identity-processing orientations and identity status. The informational orientation tends to be associated with the achieved status, the normative orientation with the foreclosed status, and the diffuse/avoidant orientation with the diffused status. The moratorium status may be associated with either the informational or diffuse/avoidant orientations. These associations have been shown to hold across immigrant generations and between genders (S. J. Schwartz & Montgomery, 2002). Moreover, the identity styles have been shown to operate as expected, and consistently across cultural contexts, in relation to attributional style (Berzonsky, Nurmi, Kinney, & Tammi, 1999) and emphasis on personal versus social aspects of identity (Berzonsky, Macek, & Nurmi, 2003).

*The role of agency in identity formation.* Erikson's (e.g., 1968) writings suggest that the formation of a coherent sense of identity in postindustrial societies would likely benefit from a sense of agency, self-direction, or free exercise of choice. Although the term *agency*

has been defined in a number of ways (e.g., Bandura, 1989; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), it is used here to refer to a sense of responsibility for one's life course, the belief that one is in control of one's decisions and is responsible for their outcomes, and the confidence that one will be able to overcome obstacles that impede one's progress along one's chosen life course (cf. Côté & Levine, 2002). In support of this definition, a composite measure of agency, consisting of self-esteem, purpose in life, ego strength, and internal locus of control, was found to be positively related to identity achievement and negatively related to identity diffusion (Côté & Schwartz, 2002).

The agency-structure debate has been a perennial, and somewhat intractable, concern in sociology dating back to its founders (see Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Part of its intractability can be traced to Durkheim's attempt to distance sociology from psychology, and the residual antipsychology flavor that has characterized attitudes among many sociologists since Durkheim's time (Côté & Levine, 2002). However, to understand personal agency, it is necessary to accept that individuals' mental states can be at least partially responsible for some social behavior, and to empirically investigate structure-agency issues it is necessary to operationalize agency in terms of individual differences in certain psychological dispositions. At the same time, it is necessary to recognize that social structures can play a role in either facilitating or blocking attempts to behave in an agentic manner (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

The empirical investigation of the role of agency in identity formation has been undertaken only recently. Côté (1997) found that, when operationalized in terms of a multimeasure approach (combining established operationalizations of concepts such as self-esteem, locus of control, ego strength, and purpose in life in one composite measure, as described below), agency appears to be unrelated to family socioeconomic background. Although the samples studied thus far have all been of university students, which tend to represent the more affluent segments of society, these samples have represented students from working-class backgrounds in addition to those from lower middle, upper middle, and upper classes. Thus, although extant research on agentic functioning cannot speak to the most disadvantaged segment of society (i.e., the "underclass"), when in a university setting, per-

sonal agency can potentially override any previous socioeconomic disadvantages in terms of important aspects of identity formation. Indeed, Côté (2002) reported that students who pay for most of their own university education appear to make a more rapid transition to adulthood, in terms of their own self-perceptions and in terms of their ability to integrate in adult communities, than do those whose parents pay for most of their education. Moreover, Côté's (1997) measure of agency was far more important than measures of structure (father's and mother's income and education) in longitudinally predicting post-university outcomes some 10 years later in terms of job satisfaction, satisfaction with progress in personal development, and how closely life circumstances match prior expectations for how one's life would unfold. Observing these results, Côté (2002) concluded that "unless sociologists recognize that some young people can cope with and even overcome certain obstacles, they risk maintaining a patronizing view of the very people whom they seem dedicated to 'liberating'" (p. 132).

#### **IDENTITY FORMATION AND AGENCY ACROSS ETHNIC/CULTURAL GROUPS**

With few exceptions, the study of identity formation is inconsistent in terms of the aspects of identity examined within and across ethnic groups or cultural contexts. Investigations of identity across ethnic or cultural groups have tended to focus on ethnic or racial aspects of identity (see S. J. Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2005; Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross, in press, for reviews). Investigations of broader and more general aspects of identity (e.g., career choices, relationship preferences, personal values) have tended to focus largely on non-Hispanic Whites. As a result, little research has examined broad or general aspects of identity across ethnic or racial groups.

Although some guidance exists regarding the hypothesis that greater degrees of agency should be associated with more favorable identity outcomes (e.g., Côté, 2002; Côté & Schwartz, 2002), the consistency of this proposition across ethnic groups has not been investigated. A search of the PsycINFO and Sociological Abstracts literature data-

bases from January 1978 through February 2004 yielded no published empirical studies investigating the association between agency and identity across ethnic or cultural groups. The current study was undertaken to address this heretofore-unexplored issue.

#### THE CURRENT STUDY

The current study was guided by two primary goals related to the agency–identity relationship. The first goal was to investigate the consistency of the agency–identity relationship across three American ethnic groups (non-Hispanic Whites, non-Hispanic Blacks, and Hispanics). The second goal was to empirically evaluate the default-developmental individualization model in emerging adulthood by examining (a) the number of clusters extracted from measures of agentic personality, (b) how three American ethnic groups (non-Hispanic Whites, non-Hispanic Blacks, and Hispanics) are represented across clusters, and (c) the extent to which various identity indices (identity status, identity exploration and commitment, and identity processing orientation) differ by agentic personality cluster.

To assess these research questions, we hypothesized the following:

The relationship between agentic personality and identity would be consistent across the three ethnic groups examined.

Two superordinate clusters of respondents would be detected in the sample based on agentic personality indices—one representing developmental individualization and the other representing default individualization.

Indices representing more developmentally advanced identity formation processes (e.g., identity achievement, informational orientation) would be more strongly endorsed by emerging adults in the developmental individualization cluster than in the default individualization cluster, and indices representing developmentally lower identity formation processes (e.g., diffuse/avoidant orientation) would be less strongly endorsed in developmental-individualization emerging adults than in default-individualization emerging adults.

No ethnic differences were anticipated in cluster membership.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

The current sample was recruited from undergraduate courses at a public, urban, multicultural university designated as a Minority Postsecondary Institution by the U.S. Department of Education, with a total minority enrollment of 76%. Participants in the current study were 332 emerging-adult university students (90 men, 242 women; mean age 21.7 years). The sample consisted of 121 non-Hispanic Whites, 77 non-Hispanic Blacks, and 134 Hispanics. Both immigrant and U.S.-born participants were represented in the sample; 75% of White participants, 60% of Black participants, and 59% of Hispanic participants were born in the United States. Foreign-born Whites were primarily from Canada and Eastern Europe; foreign-born Blacks were primarily from Haiti, Jamaica, and Trinidad; and foreign-born Hispanics were primarily from Cuba, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Puerto Rico. Accordingly, the Hispanics in the current sample were primarily of Cuban (47%), Colombian (10%), Nicaraguan (6%), and Puerto Rican (3%) descent. Cuban (74%) and Puerto Rican (75%) participants were primarily U.S. born, whereas Nicaraguan participants were primarily foreign born (89%). Colombian participants were equally likely to be U.S. born (54%) or foreign born (46%).

In terms of socioeconomic status, 22% of participants reported annual family incomes below U.S. \$30,000; 33% reported annual family incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000; 31% reported annual family incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000; and 15% reported annual family incomes above \$100,000. These socioeconomic distributions differed significantly by ethnicity,  $\chi^2(6) = 18.92, p < .005, \phi = .23$ . Of Black participants, 76% reported annual family incomes below \$50,000, whereas 64% of White participants reported annual family incomes above \$50,000. Hispanics were fairly evenly distributed among the first three socioeconomic brackets (22% below \$30,000, 33% between \$30,000 and \$50,000, 31% between \$50,000 and \$100,000); however, they were underrepresented (15%, compared to 22% of Whites) in the highest socioeconomic bracket.

Summary data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2001, Table 764) indicate that, in 1998, 37% of American families reported family in-

comes less than \$25,000, 29% between \$25,000 and \$49,999, 25% between \$50,000 and \$99,999, and 9% more than \$100,000. Comparing the current sample with these national statistics indicates that the current sample represents the range of incomes used by the U.S. Census Bureau. White respondents were somewhat more affluent than the census averages; however, Blacks and Hispanics were not.

Participants received course credit for completing the study measures. They completed the measures at home over the weekend and returned them to their instructor the following week. Participants were ensured that their responses would remain confidential and that only group results would be published.

#### MEASURES

*Identity.* As recommended by Berzonsky and Adams (1999), identity was measured using identity-processing orientation, identity exploration and commitment, and identity status. Identity-processing orientation was measured using the Identity Style Inventory (Berzonsky, 1997), a 40-item measure assessing informational (11 items), normative (9 items), and diffuse/avoidant (10 items) orientations. Sample items included "I've spent a great deal of time thinking about what I should do with my life" (informational orientation), "I prefer to deal with situations where I can rely on social norms and standards" (normative orientation), and "It's best for me not to take life too seriously; I just try to enjoy it" (diffuse/avoidant orientation). Identity exploration and commitment (32 items each) were measured using the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995). Sample items included "I have tried to learn about different occupational fields to find the best one for me" (exploration) and "I have definitely decided on the occupation I want to pursue" (commitment). Identity status was measured using the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (16 items for each status; Bennion & Adams, 1986). Sample items included "Based on past experiences, I've chosen the type of dating relationship I want now" (achievement), "I'm still trying to decide how capable I am as a person and what jobs will be right for me" (moratorium), "I guess I'm pretty much like my parents when it comes to politics; I follow what they do in terms of voting and such" (foreclosure), and "I don't give

religion much thought, and it doesn't bother me one way or the other" (diffusion). A 5-point Likert-type scale was used for all measures.<sup>1</sup> Identity exploration, commitment, and identity status were assessed in ideological and interpersonal content domains, given that identity may operate differently within these two sets of domains (Goossens, 2001; Grotevant, Thorbecke, & Meyer, 1982). Cronbach's alphas for the exploration and commitment scales ranged from .52 to .71, with a median of .60. Alphas for the identity status scales ranged from .58 to .81, with a median of .66. Alphas for the identity-processing orientation scales ranged from .65 to .72, with a median of .66.

*Agentic personality.* The Multi-Measure Agentic Personality Scale (Côté, 1997) was used to index agency. This measure contains subscales assessing self-esteem (25 items), purpose in life (12 items), internal locus of control (5 items), and ego strength (26 items). Alphas for the agentic personality scales ranged from .58 to .86, with a median of .76. Sample items from the Multi-Measure Agentic Personality Scale included "I have a low opinion of myself" (self esteem, reversed), "My personal existence is very purposeful and meaningful" (purpose in life), "What happens to me is my own doing" (locus of control), and "I have a lot of willpower" (ego strength).

As a check on the potential susceptibility of this measure to socioeconomic bias, we (a) correlated the total Multi-Measure Agentic Personality Scale score with family income and (b) compared these scores across family income categories. The correlation was negative and did not approach significance. A one-way ANOVA of agentic personality scores by family income category revealed no significant differences. Indeed, the ANOVA results suggested that, if these results held with a larger sample, agency would come out as not only not hampered by a lower socioeconomic background, but also as slightly facilitated by it. Such a finding is consistent with past research (Côté, 2002). The two lower socioeconomic status groups were characterized by higher composite agency scores than were the higher SES groups. Accordingly, there was no evidence of a social class bias in the conceptualization and operationalization of agency as presented here.

## RESULTS

Results were analyzed in three steps. First, we computed descriptive statistics for all study variables and conducted MANOVAs, separately by group of variables (identity status, identity exploration and commitment, identity-processing orientation, and agentic personality) to identify differences in study variables by ethnicity. The second step involved structural equation modeling techniques to ascertain the relationship between agency and identity and to determine whether this relationship was consistent across ethnic groups. The third step involved using cluster-analytic methods to identify groups of cases that varied systematically in terms of agentic personality scores, and to ascertain how measures of identity differed across these clusters. Effect sizes are presented for all analyses in which the effect size is not directly computable. Effect sizes are not presented for path coefficients because the effect size can be computed by squaring the coefficients. However, the eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) and phi ( $\phi$ ) indices of effect size are presented for analyses of variance and chi-square analyses, respectively.

### DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive statistics, separately by ethnic group, are presented in Table 1. The majority of study variables did not differ significantly among ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup> Those differences that did emerge tended to center on purpose in life and in commitments in ideological content areas (i.e., ideological foreclosure, ideological commitment, normative identity-processing style). In all instances of significant differences in indices of ideological commitments, non-Hispanic Whites scored significantly lower than non-Hispanic Blacks and/or Hispanics. The largest ethnic-difference effect size was .07.

### STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were first conducted to ensure that previously reported factor structures (within identity and within agency) replicated in the current sample, overall and across ethnic groups. These preliminary analyses allowed us to ensure cross-ethnic

TABLE 1  
Descriptive Statistics and Mean Differences by Ethnicity

Variable	Whites		Blacks		Hispanics		F Ratio	$\eta^2$
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)				
Agentic personality								
Multivariate test <sup>a</sup>							1.31	.02
Self-esteem	86.94 (14.45)	86.13 (13.57)	86.13 (13.57)	88.86 (15.20)	88.86 (15.20)		0.91	.01
Purpose in life	43.10 <sub>a</sub> (6.73)	42.75 <sub>a</sub> (7.21)	42.75 <sub>a</sub> (7.21)	45.29 <sub>b</sub> (6.65)	45.29 <sub>b</sub> (6.65)		4.33*	.03
Internal locus of control	18.12 (3.23)	17.91 (3.77)	17.91 (3.77)	18.80 (3.44)	18.80 (3.44)		1.88	.01
Ego strength	88.34 (12.23)	89.13 (13.46)	89.13 (13.46)	91.10 (13.99)	91.10 (13.99)		1.38	.01
Locus of control	18.12 (3.23)	17.91 (3.77)	17.91 (3.77)	18.80 (3.44)	18.80 (3.44)		1.88	.01
Identity status								
Multivariate test <sup>a</sup>							1.56	.04
Ideological diffusion	20.61 (5.39)	19.82 (4.87)	19.82 (4.87)	20.27 (4.64)	20.27 (4.64)		0.56	.00
Ideological foreclosure	15.59 <sub>a</sub> (5.40)	17.20 <sub>ab</sub> (5.37)	17.20 <sub>ab</sub> (5.37)	17.39 <sub>b</sub> (6.32)	17.39 <sub>b</sub> (6.32)		3.33*	.02
Ideological moratorium	21.54 (5.36)	19.90 (5.41)	19.90 (5.41)	20.41 (5.57)	20.41 (5.57)		2.32	.02
Ideological achievement	28.43 (4.61)	29.59 (4.44)	29.59 (4.44)	28.46 (4.67)	28.46 (4.67)		1.71	.01
Interpersonal diffusion	18.71 (5.15)	19.46 (5.92)	19.46 (5.92)	18.72 (5.79)	18.72 (5.79)		0.49	.00
Interpersonal foreclosure	14.68 (5.79)	15.83 (5.66)	15.83 (5.66)	15.61 (5.88)	15.61 (5.88)		1.15	.01
Interpersonal moratorium	21.38 (4.39)	21.37 (5.19)	21.37 (5.19)	21.85 (4.72)	21.85 (4.72)		0.39	.00
Interpersonal achievement	28.62 (4.49)	29.10 (5.29)	29.10 (5.29)	29.30 (5.00)	29.30 (5.00)		0.62	.00

Identity exploration and/or commitment					
Multivariate test <sup>a</sup>					.04
Ideological exploration	27.46 (4.64)	25.83 (4.79)	26.47 (5.27)	2.95**	.02
Ideological commitment	26.08 <sub>a</sub> (4.02)	28.14 <sub>b</sub> (3.69)	27.63 <sub>ab</sub> (3.83)	2.74	.05
Interpersonal exploration	28.50 (4.77)	26.93 (5.37)	28.13 (4.72)	8.00***	.02
Interpersonal commitment	27.45 <sub>a</sub> (5.01)	29.01 <sub>b</sub> (5.59)	28.98 <sub>b</sub> (5.07)	2.45	.02
Identity style					
Multivariate test <sup>a</sup>					.03
Informational	39.44 (5.45)	38.74 (5.43)	39.16 (5.66)	4.57***	.00
Normative	27.63 <sub>a</sub> (5.41)	30.96 <sub>b</sub> (4.83)	30.07 <sub>b</sub> (5.00)	0.36	.07
Diffuse/avoidant	25.25 (5.74)	26.30 (6.21)	24.86 (5.76)	11.44***	.01

NOTE: Within each row, means with different subscripts differ at  $p < .05$ .

a. Using Wilks's lambda.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

equivalence in the identity and agency constructs. The links between agency and identity were then examined using structural path coefficients. Consistency of CFA and path coefficients across ethnic groups was examined by comparing (a) models in which all path coefficients were free to vary by ethnicity and (b) models in which paths were constrained to be equal across ethnic groups. A nonsignificant difference in model fit between the constrained and unconstrained models indicates that the model is consistent across ethnic groups. Model fit was evaluated using the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Generally, a CFI of .95 or better, and a RMSEA of .08 or less, indicates good model fit (Kline, 1998). The chi-square statistic was not used to evaluate model fit because it is vulnerable to inflation with large sample sizes. However, Kline (1998) recommended that, for model fit to be considered adequate, the ratio of the chi-square statistic to the number of degrees of freedom should be no greater than 3.

*CFA.* The factor structure of identity measures (identity style, identity exploration and commitment, and identity status) has been found to be largely consistent across immigrant generations and between genders (S. J. Schwartz & Montgomery, 2002). This factor structure was tested in a CFA: informational orientation with identity exploration, identity commitment, and identity achievement; normative orientation with identity foreclosure; and diffuse/avoidant orientation with identity diffusion and moratorium. The three latent factors were taken to represent modes of identity structure and were labeled Exploration and Flexible Commitment, Closure and Conformity, and Avoidance, respectively. The model fit was good,  $\chi^2/df = 2.94$ , CFI = .96, RMSEA = .08. Invariance analyses indicated that the model fit comparably across ethnic groups,  $\Delta\chi^2(24) = 18.03$ , *ns*. For each ethnic group, the indicator variables loaded significantly on their respective latent variables, with the exception of ideological exploration and commitment, which loaded weakly on the Exploration and Flexible Commitment factor. Reliability estimates<sup>3</sup> (Fornell & Lacker, 1981) for the three latent factors were Exploration and Flexible Commitment, .64; Closure and Conformity, .79; and Avoidance, .78.

The CFA model for agentic personality fit the data well,  $\chi^2/df = 1.02$ , CFI > .99, RMSEA = .01. The model was consistent across eth-

nic groups,  $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 4.36$ , *ns*. All four agentic personality scales loaded significantly on the latent factor: self-esteem,  $\lambda = .89$ ,  $p < .001$ ; purpose in life,  $\lambda = .68$ ,  $p < .001$ ; locus of control,  $\lambda = .33$ ,  $p < .01$ ; and ego strength,  $\lambda = .78$ ,  $p < .001$ . This factor, therefore, appeared to be most strongly indicative of self-esteem, ego strength, and purpose in life, and less strongly indicative of locus of control. Reliability for the latent factor was .81.

*Identity-agency model.* The full model linking identity to agency fit the data well,  $\chi^2/df = 2.56$ , CFI = .96, RMSEA = .07. This model was consistent across ethnic groups,  $\Delta\chi^2(36) = 47.80$ , *ns*. In the model, agentic personality was positively related to exploration and flexible commitment,  $\beta = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ ; unrelated to closure and conformity,  $\beta = -.06$ , *ns*; and negatively related to avoidance,  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $p < .01$  (see Figure 1).

We also conducted analyses to ascertain whether the model relating identity to agency was consistent between younger (younger than age 21) and older (ages 21 to 29) emerging adults. Invariance analyses indicated that the model was consistent between age groups,  $\Delta\chi^2(17) = 15.55$ , *ns*.

#### CLUSTER ANALYSES

Having demonstrated consistent relationships between agency and identity that generalize across ethnic groups, we investigated whether (a) the sample could be divided into empirically distinguishable subgroups based on agentic personality scores, (b) indices of identity development would differ between or among these clusters, and (c) the clusters would differ in terms of ethnicity or age group (i.e., older or younger). We conducted Ward's method of hierarchical cluster analyses, using squared Euclidean distance, to identify the best-fitting cluster solution. We examined two-, three-, four-, and five-cluster solutions. A two-cluster solution provided the best and most parsimonious fit to the data; in the three-, four-, and five-cluster solutions, less than 8% of the sample was classified into a cluster other than Cluster 1 or Cluster 2. Moreover, using the two-cluster solution, when we conducted a discriminant function analysis predicting cluster membership using the four agentic personality variables, 98% of cases were

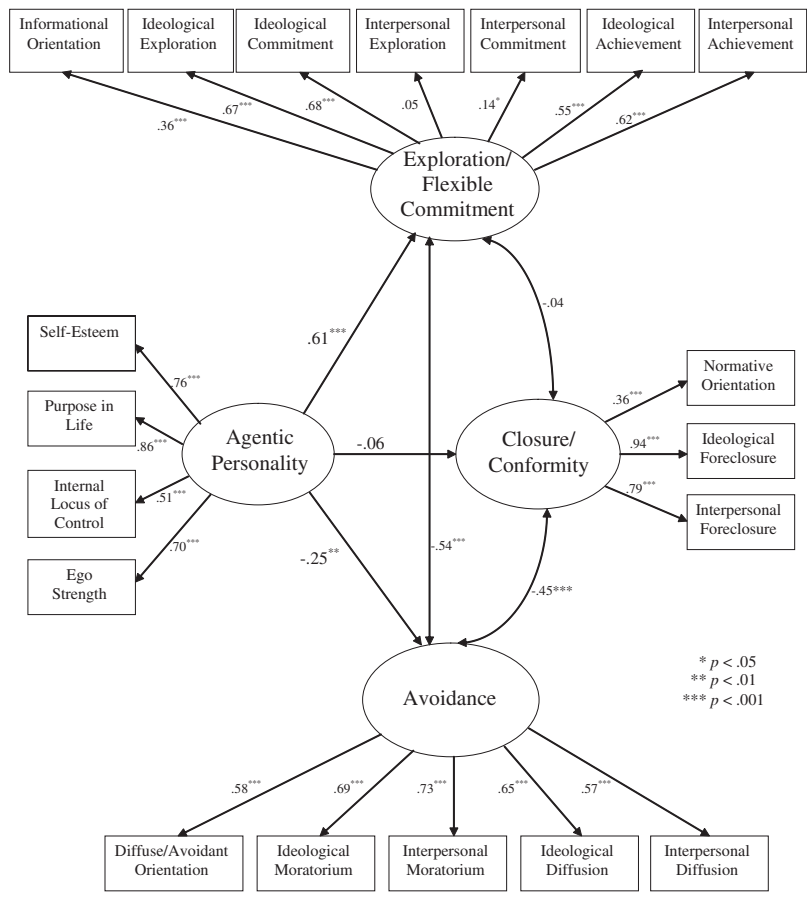


Figure 1 Agency-Identity Model

correctly classified. Therefore, the two-cluster solution was retained. Because of missing data, 25 participants were not classified into one of the two clusters. Participants not classified because missing agentic personality data were more likely (at a small effect size) to be Black (52%) than White (12%) or Hispanic (36%),  $\chi^2(2) = 14.25, p < .002, \phi = .21$ .

Cluster 1 was titled default individualization, and Cluster 2 was named developmental individualization. The default individualiza-

tion cluster consisted of 171 participants, and the developmental individualization cluster consisted of 136 participants. Men,  $\chi^2(1) = 5.13$ ,  $p < .03$ ,  $\phi = .13$ , and younger emerging adults (younger than age 21),  $\chi^2(1) = 4.76$ ,  $p < .04$ ,  $\phi = .16$ , were overrepresented in the default individualization cluster. The developmental individualization cluster was 22% male, whereas the default individualization cluster was 34% male. Similarly, younger emerging adults made up 50% of the developmental individualization cluster but 66% of the default individualization cluster. Ethnicity was not significantly related to cluster membership.

To identify the extent to which each of the four agentic personality variables differed by cluster, we conducted a MANOVA. This analysis revealed a significant multivariate effect, Wilks's  $\lambda = .29$ ,  $F(4, 302) = 186.90$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .71$ . Examining univariate effects revealed that self-esteem,  $F(1, 305) = 463.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .60$ , and ego strength,  $F(1, 305) = 338.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .53$ , differed between clusters at a large effect size ( $\eta^2 \geq .50$ ; Cohen, 1988); purpose in life,  $F(1, 305) = 217.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .42$ , differed between clusters at a medium effect size ( $\eta^2 \geq .30$ ); and internal locus of control,  $F(1, 305) = 42.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$ , differed between clusters at a small effect size ( $\eta^2 \geq .10$ ). Scores on all four variables were significantly greater in the developmental individualization cluster than in the default individualization cluster. Table 2 displays these results.

*Identity variables by cluster membership.* We conducted MANOVAs to ascertain the extent to which the identity status, exploration and commitment, and identity style variables differed by agency cluster. The identity status MANOVA yielded a significant multivariate effect, Wilks's  $\lambda = .76$ ,  $F(8, 286) = 11.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .24$ . All univariate effects were significant at the .001 level, with ideological moratorium ( $\eta^2 = .15$ ) and interpersonal diffusion ( $\eta^2 = .13$ ) associated with the largest differences between clusters (see Table 2). Ideological and interpersonal foreclosure (both  $\eta^2 = .05$ ) were associated with the smallest differences between clusters. In both the ideological and interpersonal domain clusters, diffusion, foreclosure, and moratorium scores were higher in the default individualization cluster, whereas achievement scores were higher in the developmental individualization cluster.

**TABLE 2**  
**Agency and Identity Variables by Cluster Membership**

Variable	Cluster		F Ratio	$\eta^2$
	Developmental Individualization	Default Individualization		
Agentic personality				
Multivariate test <sup>a</sup>			186.90***	.71
Self-esteem	97.63 (8.90)	74.88 (9.57)	463.06***	.60
Purpose in life	47.87 (4.97)	38.96 (5.61)	217.16***	.42
Internal locus of control	19.42 (3.18)	17.01 (3.29)	42.27***	.12
Ego strength	98.18 (9.29)	78.87 (8.93)	338.92***	.53
Identity status				
Multivariate test <sup>a</sup>			11.52***	.24
Ideological diffusion	19.07 (4.75)	21.88 (5.00)	24.42***	.08
Ideological foreclosure	15.53 (5.30)	17.98 (6.06)	13.66***	.05
Ideological moratorium	18.79 (4.85)	23.13 (5.37)	53.08***	.15
Ideological achievement	29.87 (4.20)	27.23 (4.69)	25.95***	.08
Interpersonal diffusion	17.21 (5.06)	21.22 (5.27)	44.04***	.13
Interpersonal foreclosure	14.18 (5.10)	16.68 (6.32)	14.25***	.05
Interpersonal moratorium	20.32 (4.21)	23.07 (4.95)	26.49***	.08
Interpersonal achievement	30.18 (4.92)	27.53 (4.47)	22.90***	.07
Identity exploration and commitment				
Multivariate test <sup>a</sup>			11.02***	.13
Ideological exploration	26.65 (5.16)	26.57 (4.58)	0.02	.00
Ideological commitment	27.99 (3.64)	25.95 (4.09)	20.98***	.07
Interpersonal exploration	27.88 (5.17)	28.01 (4.45)	0.06	.00
Interpersonal commitment	29.86 (5.01)	26.52 (4.92)	33.81***	.10
Identity style				
Multivariate test <sup>a</sup>			14.82***	.13
Informational	40.02 (5.26)	37.85 (5.59)	11.86**	.04
Normative	29.84 (5.19)	28.61 (5.10)	4.17*	.01
Diffuse/avoidant	23.57 (5.62)	27.16 (5.18)	32.01***	.10

NOTE: a. Using Wilks's lambda.  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

*Identity exploration and commitment by cluster membership.* A MANOVA conducted on the identity exploration and commitment scores by cluster membership yielded a significant multivariate effect, Wilks's  $\lambda = .87$ ,  $F(8, 298) = 11.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .13$ . At the univariate level, ideological ( $\eta^2 = .07$ ) and interpersonal ( $\eta^2 = .10$ ) commitment differed significantly between agentic personality clusters, whereas neither of the exploration indices differed by cluster (see Table 2). The

ideological and interpersonal commitment scores were higher in the developmental individualization cluster than in the default individualization cluster.

*Identity-processing orientation by cluster membership.* A MANOVA conducted on the identity-processing orientation variables by agentic personality cluster yielded a significant multivariate effect, Wilks's  $\lambda = .87$ ,  $F(3, 293) = 14.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .13$ . Significant univariate effects emerged for all three processing-orientation scales: informational,  $F(1, 295) = 11.86$ ,  $p < .002$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ ; normative,  $F(1, 295) = 4.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ ; and diffuse/avoidant,  $F(1, 295) = 32.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ . Informational and normative orientation scores were higher in the developmental individualization cluster, whereas diffuse/avoidant orientation scores were higher in the default individualization cluster.

## DISCUSSION

The current study was conducted to investigate the relationship between agency and identity in an ethnically diverse sample of emerging adults. Two aspects of this relationship were tested (a) consistency across ethnic groups and (b) differences in identity indices between clusters of participants organized according to their patterns of agentic personality scores. In testing the consistency of the agency-identity relationship across three ethnic groups, we grouped the variables according to the three identity-processing orientations and their identity-related correlates. This strategy of grouping identity indices according to identity-processing orientation is drawn from Berzonsky and Adams (1999), and the specific patterns of correlates assigned to each style were drawn from recent research using an ethnically diverse sample (S. J. Schwartz & Montgomery, 2002).

Supporting the hypothesis that identity and agency would be consistent across ethnic groups, few ethnic mean differences were found in the indices of agency and identity used in the current study. Those differences that did emerge indicated that non-Hispanic Whites were less committed in the ideological content areas than were members of the other ethnic groups. Only one small difference emerged in the in-

terpersonal content areas. More globally, the results of our structural equation modeling analyses suggest that the agency–identity relationship is consistent across the three ethnic groups studied: agency is positively related to exploration, flexible commitment, and deliberate choice making, unrelated to closure and conformity, and negatively related to avoidance and aimlessness. In other words, across ethnic groups, agentic personality is implicated positively in information-based identity strategies, including exploration and commitment, but negatively in avoidance-based strategies. Agentic personality does not appear to be related to norm-based strategies (which may be culturally appropriate in some ethnic groups). These results support the cross-ethnic generalizability of Erikson's (1968) theory of identity as well as that of neo-Eriksonian identity theories proposed by Berzonsky (1989), Côté and Levine (2002), and Marcia (1966). More specifically, this finding supports Côté's (2000; Côté & Levine, 2002) contention that agentic functioning is an important component of individualized identity development and, hence of effective adaptation to postindustrial societies, in emerging adulthood.

The results of the cluster analyses are even more supportive of the proposition that the individualization process can be separated into default and developmental forms. Among the agentic personality variables, the default and developmental individualization clusters differed most strongly in self-esteem and ego strength, intermediately in purpose in life, and least strongly in internal locus of control. These differences paralleled the respective strengths of the factor loadings on the confirmatory factor analysis for agentic personality variables. What can be surmised from the clustering of agentic personality variables, then, is that developmental individualization draws most on positive self-perceptions and the ability to cope effectively, and less so on a sense of life purpose. Attributing life outcomes to one's own choices appears least strongly related to the ability of emerging adults to capitalize on the relatively unstructured and unguided task of forming an identity in contemporary American society.

In terms of identity indices, it was noteworthy that commitment, but not exploration, differed between the default and developmental individualization clusters. Similarly, among the three identity-processing styles, the diffuse/avoidant identity style differed most strongly between clusters (and was higher in default individualiza-

tion), and indices of diffusion and moratorium were highest in default individualization. The picture that emerges from these results is that what differentiates emerging adults following a default individualization pathway from those following a developmental individualization pathway, across ethnic groups, is commitment to a set of goals, values, and beliefs. Such commitments appear to provide resources for emerging adults to counteract the anomie and lack of collective support associated with identity formation and the transition to adulthood in the United States, and perhaps in other postindustrial societies.

Although the current study was cross-sectional and does not provide data points tracking developmental processes, the results suggest that different forms and degrees of agency may play an important role in identity development in emerging adulthood. The results also suggest that older emerging adults may be more likely than younger emerging adults to choose developmental, rather than default, forms of individualization. Moreover, the role of default and developmental individualization in identity formation appears to generalize across ethnic backgrounds. This generalizability also needs to be studied cross-culturally. The current study provides a much-needed basis for such cross-cultural studies, as well as for the study of the psychological processes that might be required for humans to adapt to the new challenges presented by “individualized” societies (Bauman, 2001).

The results of the current study also have implications for the theory of emerging adulthood. According to this theory (Arnett, 2000, 2004), emerging adulthood is characterized by identity explorations in love, work, and worldviews, and for most young people these explorations lead to stable choices by the end of their 20s. The current study suggests that identity exploration and flexible commitment to life alternatives may be especially likely in emerging adults who adopt developmental individualization strategies and who possess and utilize agentic qualities to greater extents. Although exploration did not differ significantly between emerging adults adopting developmental versus default individualization strategies, it is the nature and context of this exploration that differentiates the two sets of strategies. For emerging adults adopting developmental individualization strategies, exploration in areas such as romantic relationships, career paths, and worldviews should be more coherently organized and directed toward

making the most of opportunities to explore a variety of possible directions for one's life.

However, those emerging adults who utilize default individualization strategies score relatively low in ego strength, self-esteem, and life purpose, and they appear to lack a commitment to a set of goals, values, and beliefs that would provide a basis for guiding their way through the exceptionally unstructured years of emerging adulthood. Exploration for these emerging adults may be an unguided, haphazard process that produces more confusion than it alleviates. Consequently, for these emerging adults, identity issues may be reflected not in systematic exploration of the possibilities available to them but rather in aimlessness and anomie characteristic of a diffuse identity structure.

In sum, the results indicate that emerging adults are diverse in their characteristics, and that their diversity should be kept in mind in any attempts to characterize them as a group (Arnett, 2000). Some emerging adults appear well prepared to make their way into the roles and responsibilities of adulthood, bolstered with more stable, coherent, and commitment-based identities, whereas others may require external help (e.g., intervention) to transition into adult roles and responsibilities.

#### LIMITATIONS

The current results should be interpreted in light of some important limitations. First, there is reason to question the appropriateness of a university sample for examining cross-ethnic differences in the agency-identity relationship. In the United States in 1995, less than 14% of all bachelor's degrees were awarded to non-White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). However, it is worthy of note that the university at which the current research was conducted has been designated by the U.S. Department of Education (2002) as a Minority Serving Institution (with a total minority enrollment of 76%). The university is located in Miami, a city with a large population of Hispanics, African Americans, and Caribbean Islanders. As a result, the Blacks and Hispanics included in the current sample may be more representative of their respective local populations than may ethnic minority samples from more mainstream universities. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that many minority emerging adults do not at-

tend university, and that the current sample may not represent minority emerging adults as a population, especially those in the forgotten half (Halperin, 2001). Indeed, although the extent to which emerging adulthood manifests itself similarly for college students versus non-college individuals is not completely clear, there is some evidence that the university experience often protects emerging adults from financial commitments that the forgotten half must face (e.g., Arnett, 1994; Holmstrom, Karp, & Gray, 2002).

Second, as noted earlier, the cross-sectional design used in the current study did not permit us to study development across emerging adulthood. Although the current results are suggestive of developmental processes and may pave the way for future research, it is important that this future research use longitudinal designs to track the relationships between agentic functioning and identity development across time. Such longitudinal studies might also explore the extent to which the default and developmental individualization trajectories are associated with successful assumption of adult roles later on.

Despite these limitations, the current study has contributed knowledge regarding cultural diversity and cross-ethnic consistency to the study of the agency-identity relationship. The results support the dichotomizing of individualization into default and developmental pathways and suggest that identity development differs markedly between these pathways. The current results also have important implications for emerging adulthood as a developmental period. The findings suggest that one of the primary tasks of emerging adulthood may be to develop an agentic orientation consonant with developmental individualization, which may facilitate effective decision making and problem solving in the context of minimal collective support. It is hoped that these results will find their way into community and applied settings, where they can assist in the design of interventions to help emerging adults to develop the agentic capacities necessary to navigate this unstructured developmental stage.

## NOTES

1. Although the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire and Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status were designed to use 6-point Likert scales, 5-point scales were used in the present

study because of the standard response sheets available to the authors for computerized scoring of questionnaires.

2. Although gender was not a focal variable in the present study, we did test for gender differences in each of the four sets of variables. No significant Gender X Ethnicity interactions emerged for any of the study variables. However, some main effects of gender did emerge. Males were significantly higher on interpersonal diffusion, ideological and interpersonal diffusion and foreclosure, and endorsement of the diffuse/avoidant style. Females were significantly higher on interpersonal commitment. The largest gender-difference effect size was .05.

3. In this formula, reliability is posited as the ratio of the variability explained by the latent factor to the total variability among the indicators.

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