

## **A New Identity for Identity Research: Recommendations for Expanding and Refocusing the Identity Literature**

Seth J. Schwartz  
*University of Miami*

I have been following the identity literature for more than 10 years and have been an active contributor to this literature since 1998. During the years that I have followed and contributed to the identity literature, I have had the opportunity to observe and take note of the general areas and themes that have been emphasized in this literature as well as important areas that have been neglected. In this editorial essay, I comment on some of the areas in which identity research has been lacking and on ways to expand identity research by focusing on these areas. I restrict my analysis to the literature rooted in Eriksonian and neo-Eriksonian theory because that is the area with which I am most familiar.

I touch on a number of important areas, including methodological short-sightedness, reliance on a narrow and limiting theoretical approach, and lack of attention to important applied and social policy issues. However, I deliberately do not touch on another potentially problematic area in identity research—measurement issues—in this essay. I believe that measurement issues are secondary to theoretical issues, more broadly based research design issues, and applicability issues—and therefore that measurement issues should be raised only after these more important issues have been addressed. The measures that are selected for use in any given study are guided by the theoretical approach and research questions on which the study is based. As the identity literature expands to cover new ground, measures will be adapted or created to address the specific identity dimensions, research objectives, and populations being examined.

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### **The Promise of Identity Theory**

I have been intrigued by the concept of identity for many years. As proposed by Erikson, identity helps one to make sense of, and to find one's place in, an almost limitless world with a vast set of possibilities. Because it provides an anchor in a sea of possibilities and allows one to define oneself as something in particular, identity would seem to have a great deal of practical value. It is likely for this reason that Erikson made identity the cornerstone of his theory of personality. For example, a colleague of mine at a major adolescent drug abuse research center would often say in meetings that a coherent sense of identity was one of the key attributes that drug-abusing adolescents lacked. The Search Institute (2003), one of the leading supporters of the positive youth development movement, has listed identity as one of its 40 developmental assets. Huntington (1996), in a treatise about global conflicts in the 21st century, argued that identity is at the center of these conflicts, in that clashes between countries' or groups' self-definitions produce disagreements (or worse). When immigrants settle in their new homelands, it is reasonable to expect that a stable set of goals, values, and beliefs would help to anchor the immigrant during her or his transition into a new society.

With all of this promise, one would figure that the identity research literature would be broad and would address a multitude of practical issues. However, this has not been the case. This editorial essay represents an attempt to lay out some potential areas in which the identity literature could expand to increase its relevance and impact and to more fully represent the grandness and applicability with which Erikson envisioned identity.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE IDENTITY LITERATURE AND WAYS TO ADDRESS THEM**

The primary limitation I have observed in identity research has been its narrowness. This narrowness has taken several forms. Some of these are theoretical, whereas others are methodological and still others are in the applied arena. Theoretically speaking, the identity literature has relied largely on Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm. The identity status paradigm is based on the assumedly independent dimensions of exploration (sorting through various potential identity choices) and commitment (deciding to adhere to one or more sets of goals, values, and beliefs). Exploration and commitment are then crossed to derive four identity statuses: achieved (high exploration, high commitment), moratorium (high exploration, low commitment), foreclosure (low exploration, high commitment), and diffusion (low

exploration, low commitment). Achievement represents the consolidation of a sense of identity; moratorium represents the active search for a set of goals, values, and beliefs; foreclosure represents commitment without much prior exploration; and diffusion represents apathy and a lack of concern with identity issues. The identity statuses are assumed to operate in a number of content domains such as political preferences, religious ideology, career choices, and friendship ideals, to name a few.

Identity status was derived from Erikson's theory of identity, and the two theories do share some themes in common (see Waterman, 1988, 1999, for an extended discussion). Identity status theory has been instrumental in establishing a line of neo-Eriksonian identity research. However, as I (Schwartz, 2001) and others (Côté & Levine, 1988; van Hoof, 1999) have argued, identity status theory significantly underrepresents Erikson. Erikson portrayed identity as a collaborative project between the young person and her or his context, and he delineated three distinct levels of identity—ego, personal, and social. Ego identity represents the innermost and most unconscious processes underlying the formation of identity. Erikson referred to these processes as silent and implied that they are not measurable. Personal identity represents goals, values, and beliefs—the bulk of what identity status theory and research has attended to. However, there is another aspect of personal identity to which identity status theory has not attended—namely, the self that the individual presents to the outside world and the processes by which one presents this self to the world. Social identity refers to group identifications and to one's assigned and chosen place in the social world, as well as to processes by which one negotiates one's way through the social world. For example, being male or female carries certain expectations in a given cultural context, but the person also has a lot of leeway to define the personal significance and meaning of being male or female. As such, Erikson placed emphasis on the interaction between assigned identity elements (e.g., gender, ethnicity, nationality) and the meanings that individuals give to those assigned identity elements. Jean Phinney's operationalization of ethnic identity draws heavily on this component of Erikson's theory. According to Phinney (1990), individuals with a strong sense of ethnic or national identity have ingrained their ethnicity or nationality deeply into their sense of self, and they highlight their ethnic or national background in many of their interactions with their social world. Although it would seem natural for identity status theory to incorporate Phinney's ideas (and therefore to incorporate an important element of Erikson's theory of social identity), identity status theory does not attend to ethnicity or nationality. This is a major weakness, especially in today's global world where people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds come into contact on an everyday basis.

My recommendation regarding identity theory is to move beyond the status approach. As I argued in a review paper I published a few years ago (Schwartz, 2001), it is time to move the study of identity beyond the status paradigm and to bring neo-Eriksonian research closer to Erikson's original formulations. This means not only using a more multidimensional model of identity that integrates personal and social aspects of self, but also honoring Erikson's mission to make identity useful in the applied arena. Knowing what personality characteristics and decision-making styles are related to the foreclosed status is certainly interesting, but the practical value that can be extracted from identity status-based studies is limited. Practical issues such as understanding how identity confusion and lack of collective support for identity development relate to substance use and irresponsible sexual behavior may be of considerably more public health importance. A broader concept of identity, including both personal and social identity, may be applicable to a broader range of cultural groups, research questions, and practical applications.

### **METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES**

Methodologically speaking, there appear to be two general limitations in identity research. First, the majority of identity studies have been conducted with emerging-adult university students, with far fewer studies conducted with middle and high school adolescents or with nonuniversity emerging adults. Second, the large majority of identity research has been cross-sectional and therefore cannot speak directly to the developmental functions of identity. In the sections immediately below, I review each of these limitations individually.

#### **Reliance on University Student Samples**

As I have found in my own research, university student samples are convenient and readily accessible, and they provide unfunded researchers with opportunities to gather data. However, the reliance on university student samples creates generalizability problems and leaves unaddressed three important areas of need in identity research: (a) the need to include greater numbers of non-Whites, whose shares of the university student population are much lower than their shares of the general population; (b) the need to include poor adolescents and emerging adults, as well as individuals who drop out of high school or who enter the workforce immediately after graduation, in identity research; and (c) the need to include more middle and high

school adolescents in identity research. Attention to these needs can help to broaden identity research and to expand its applicability to a much broader range of young people.

*Need to include non-Whites in identity research.* The overwhelming majority of identity studies have been conducted with White samples (Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross, in press). The lack of attention to non-Whites is an important omission for a number of reasons. First, non-White populations in countries such as the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands are growing at such rapid rates that Whites will comprise only about half the populations of these countries by the middle of this century. Moreover, adolescents and emerging adults make up larger shares of the non-White populations than of the White populations in these and other Western countries—meaning that there is even more diversity among the young. Including only small numbers of non-Whites in research samples therefore inhibits generalizability to the adolescent and emerging adult population as a whole.

Second, non-Whites have unique identity concerns—such as ethnic identity—that have been largely ignored in the identity status literature. Because the identity status literature has focused mostly on Whites and because the ethnic identity literature has focused mostly on non-Whites, the identity status and ethnic identity literature have remained separate both theoretically (in terms of the aspects of identity to which they attend) and empirically (in terms of the populations studied). Because few researchers have attempted to identify and capitalize on commonalities between identity status and ethnic identity theory and research, the two lines of research have remained segregated—and the possibility of an integrated theory that might be applicable to both Whites and non-Whites has not been sufficiently explored.

Third, it is possible that the identity formation process itself operates differently in White versus non-White individuals. Drawing on the cross-cultural notions of individualism (i.e., prioritizing the individual over the group) and collectivism (i.e., prioritizing the group over the individual), there is evidence that individuals from primarily collectivist cultures may be more likely than those from primarily individualistic cultures to defend their group when the group receives negative feedback, regardless of the type of feedback that they receives individually (Chen, Brockner, & Katz, 1998). This suggests that although there is evidence that the internal structure of personal identity may be consistent across ethnic and national groups (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, in press), the salience of personal versus social identity may differ across ethnic, racial, or national groups. The lack of attention to this

issue within neo-Eriksonian identity theory and research is a by-product of (a) the focus primarily on Whites and (b) the lack of consideration of social and ethnic aspects of identity. Although some writers (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Côté, 1996; Sneed et al., in press) have called for the incorporation of social and ethnic components of identity into the neo-Eriksonian identity literature, these calls have gone largely unheeded.

I have four recommendations in this area. First, as my colleagues and I have argued in a recently accepted manuscript (Sneed et al., in press), all articles reporting empirical studies on identity should identify the ethnic breakdown of the sample. Second, research with multiethnic samples should be strongly encouraged, and research conducted with primarily White samples should be replicated with multiethnic samples to ensure generalizability of findings. Third, identity-related constructs relevant primarily to non-White ethnic groups, such as ethnic and racial identity, should be studied along with broader understandings of identity. Fourth, cross-ethnic and cross-national studies of identity processes should be conducted. Such research may (a) help to ascertain the extent to which non-White specific identity constructs are related to more global concepts of identity, (b) shed light on the extent to which including ethnic or racial identity and related constructs increases the salience of identity theory and research for non-White groups, and (c) explore the possibility that within some groups, identity interacts with specific cultural processes to produce developmental outcomes.

*Need to include poor and less educated individuals in identity research.* The underrepresentation of low socioeconomic status and less educated individuals in identity research has limited our understanding of identity to individuals with the economic wherewithal and desire to attend university. As Phillips and Pittman (2003) have observed, we know almost nothing about identity processes in poor adolescents and emerging adults. We also know little about identity development in individuals who drop out of high school or who enter the workforce immediately after graduation.

In a conceptual analysis, Yoder (2000) enumerated a number of barriers that might impede identity development in low socioeconomic status adolescents and emerging adults. Yoder argued that poverty constricts the range of identity choices available to the person and forces her or him to select from a less desirable set of alternatives. Given that intangible identity attributes such as skills, knowledge, and advanced degrees may be required to negotiate for social resources and for attention from important social institutions (e.g., high-paying jobs), it stands to reason that lack of education may also invoke barriers to identity development. Poor and less educated people may not be aware of the intrapersonal attributes (e.g., higher education, computer skills,

self-direction) that are necessary to get ahead in unstructured Western societies, and even if they are aware, they may not possess the necessary attributes.

Although these propositions appear to make sense, they have yet to be investigated empirically. Such investigations would involve conducting research with adolescents and emerging adults who are poor and/or not bound for university. With its reliance on university student samples, however, the identity literature has not been in a position to examine identity processes and barriers in poor and less educated individuals. My recommendation is therefore to encourage research on low-income and less educated adolescents and emerging adults. Comparisons of university students with similarly aged individuals not attending university may provide an estimate of what can be gained by including nonuniversity participants in identity research.

*Need to study younger adolescents.* The exclusion of middle and high school adolescents from most identity research allows for examination only of the tail end of Erikson's identity stage. In contemporary Western societies, identity is often consolidated during the emerging adult years, making university-age populations appropriate for studying identity consolidation. However, early and middle adolescence, during which identity development is first envisioned and undertaken, may provide important information about the antecedents to and correlates of successful identity development. Moreover, longitudinal studies that follow young people through the process of identity development, from early adolescence through emerging adulthood, may have the potential to shed the most light on the nature and course of the process. Gender, ethnic, and national variations in the nature and course of identity development may also be important areas of study. My recommendation is therefore to study both adolescents and emerging adults, to capture the entirety of Erikson's identity stage. We actually know much more about how the identity development process is consolidated than about how it begins, so research on identity development in early adolescents is especially warranted.

### **Need for Longitudinal Research**

The bulk of identity studies are cross-sectional and involve data collection at only one point in time. Such studies have been informative in identifying correlates of the identity statuses and in ascertaining the extent to which each identity status is manifested at a given point in time. However, now that the correlates of each status have been well documented (see Marcia, 1993; Waterman, 1999, for reviews), it is time to progress to longitudinal studies. Longitudinal studies are necessary to map the course of identity development

and to identify antecedents and consequences of identity development. For example, ascertaining the conditions and characteristics that lead to more versus less successful identity development requires that the hypothesized conditions and antecedents be measured prior to assessing identity. Similarly, examining consequences of identity development requires that the hypothesized consequences be measured at a later point in time, after identity has been assessed. An even more informative approach would be to follow the course of identity over multiple assessment points and to identify antecedents to and consequences of this developmental course. The antecedents and consequences, as well as the developmental course itself, may differ between genders and across racial, ethnic, and national groups. Therefore, longitudinal identity studies (including those conducted across ethnic groups or in multiple countries) may provide much more extensive information than can be obtained from cross-sectional studies.

My recommendation is to conduct longitudinal studies examining the relationships of identity to positive and negative life outcomes and to examine the social and contextual conditions associated with more versus less successful identity development. This recommendation refers to two related advancements in identity research. First, as noted earlier, conducting longitudinal studies allows for the developmental functions of identity to be ascertained. The fact that identity is positively related to adaptive mental health outcomes at a single point in time does not tell us whether promoting identity would result in improvements in these outcomes over time. The relationship could just as easily operate in the opposite direction, with positive mental health producing a coherent sense of identity. It is important that identity intervention programs be based on precise understandings of how identity relates to behavioral and mental health outcomes.

Second, ascertaining the conditions associated with more versus less successful and coherent identity development can help to specify mechanisms to promote identity development in young people. For example, some cross-sectional studies (Mullis, Brailsford, & Mullis, 2003) have found that a cohesive family environment is associated with a more coherent sense of identity in adolescents and young adults. If this relationship is replicated longitudinally such that family cohesion precedes and predicts identity coherence, then promoting a cohesive family environment might be endorsed as a way to facilitate identity development. Similar studies and endorsements might be pursued with regard to processes such as school bonding, the availability of positive gender and ethnic role models, and peer acceptance.

## APPLIED ISSUES

Last, there are some important applied issues that need to be addressed in identity research—that is, important public health areas that identity has the potential to address but that have been sparsely taken up (or not taken up at all) within the identity literature. Much identity research has focused on how identity processes and statuses relate to personality characteristics, decision making, and other intrapsychic qualities. Although such research is of interest to researchers working within the identity community, its relevance to practical and real world contexts is likely limited. I include much of my own research in my characterization of the identity literature as narrow; only recently have I begun to focus on expanding the identity literature beyond its present limits.

I discuss three applied issues in this essay: adolescent and emerging adult health risk behaviors and psychological problems, immigration and acculturation, and terrorism. I discuss each of these issues in terms of theory, empirical research, and intervention and policy implications.

### Health Risk Behaviors and Psychological Problems

Adolescents and emerging adults engage in certain health risk behaviors, such as substance abuse and unsafe sex, to a greater extent than do individuals in any other phase of life. Both substance abuse and unsafe sex may pose risks for contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. In fact, according to a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2004), among age groups, adolescents and emerging adults have among the highest HIV contraction rates. For this reason, identifying processes that can protect adolescents and emerging adults from substance abuse and unsafe sex has become an important public health priority.

In cross-sectional studies, identity has been shown to be inversely related to both substance use (Jones & Hartmann, 1988; Jones, Hartmann, Grochowski, & Glider, 1989) and unsafe sex (Hernandez & DiClemente, 1992). These studies have suggested that identity may serve as a protective mechanism against these health risk behaviors. As mentioned earlier, longitudinal research is needed to establish the developmental functions of identity regarding health risk behaviors. Moreover, the precise nature of the protective effects of identity (e.g., identity as a predictor of onset versus exacerbation of substance use and sexual behavior) should be investigated. Knowledge gained from such investigations can be used to design interventions in which identity, either alone or in combination with other aspects of positive functioning, is used to prevent or reduce substance use or sexual risk

taking. It is important that such intervention programs be based on precise understandings of how identity relates to behavioral and mental health outcomes.

Identity may also play an important role in psychological problems such as anxiety and depression. In her studies on self-concept, Harter (1999) has conceptualized low self-worth as a component of depression. It is possible that a fragmented or incoherent sense of identity may also be associated with depression. A search of the PsycInfo psychological literature database from January 1978 through August 2004 yielded a small number of studies examining the relationship of ethnic identity to depression (McMahon & Watts, 2002; Simons et al., 2002). However, the search yielded no published empirical studies linking more general conceptions of identity with depression or anxiety. Moreover, even those studies conducted with ethnic identity were cross-sectional. As is the case with substance use and sexual risk taking, establishing identity as a mechanism for preventing or reducing psychological problems requires that identity be found to predict psychological problems longitudinally or that changes in identity predict changes in psychological symptoms. My recommendation would be to encourage longitudinal studies examining the relationship of identity to health risk behaviors (e.g., substance abuse, unsafe sexual behavior) and to psychological problems (e.g., anxiety, depression).

### **Immigration and Acculturation**

Immigration and acculturation are extremely important issues in today's world. Current worldwide rates of international migration are the highest in recent history. In most cases, individuals from developing, primarily collectivist societies are immigrating to developed, primarily individualistic societies. The experience of immigration is frequently accompanied by acculturation, which refers to an adaptation process that takes place as the immigrant adopts some ideals, values, and behaviors of the host culture and (typically) retains some of the ideals, values, and beliefs of his or her culture of origin. Immigration and acculturation are often stressful, given that the immigrant must immerse herself or himself in a new culture and often must undergo a great deal of personal change. Moving from a primarily collectivist society where family and community provide a great deal of support to a primarily individualistic society in which little formal support is available requires that immigrants possess intangible attributes that can help them adjust to their new homelands. One such attribute may be a coherent and well-organized sense of identity. However, thus far, the identity literature has paid scant attention to immigrant adjustment and acculturation.

As my colleagues and I argue in a manuscript that has been submitted for publication (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2005), empirical research is badly needed on the role of identity in the acculturation process. This is true for at least two reasons. First, immigration and acculturation have been associated with a number of health risk behaviors and psychological problems, including substance abuse (Isralowitz & Slonim-Nevo, 2002) and depression (Oh, Koeske, & Sales, 2002), especially for immigrants who adopt values of the host culture and abandon those of their heritage culture. Ascertaining the identity processes associated with abandoning one's heritage culture may therefore be an important prerequisite to designing interventions to promote positive health outcomes in immigrants. Second, when families immigrate together, children and adolescents often acculturate more quickly than their parents do. The resulting intergenerational acculturation differences may cause friction within the family, and in turn, this friction may predispose immigrant adolescents and emerging adults to substance abuse, unsafe sexual behavior, or psychological problems. In cases such as these, it is possible that a positive and coherent sense of identity may help to protect the adolescent or emerging adult from these negative developmental outcomes. Again, empirical research is needed to substantiate this hypothesis.

Third, acculturative stress—undesirable side effects of acculturation such as perceived discrimination, awareness of acute differences between one's cultural orientation and that of the new host society, and perceived pressure to assimilate—may be associated with depression and physical health problems (Finch, Hummer, Kolody, & Vega, 2001). It is possible that a positive and coherent sense of identity may help to offset the effects of acculturative stress by providing the person with a stable sense of self. Such a stable sense of self may then help the person better withstand the effects of acculturative stress. However, this hypothesis has yet to be tested empirically.

Taken together, these potential roles of identity within the acculturation process appear to warrant empirical research. Such research could further ascertain the developmental functions of identity in relation to immigration and acculturation. In turn, these empirically established developmental functions of identity could be used to develop intervention programs to foster a coherent and positive sense of identity in immigrants (and perhaps to offset the negative side effects of immigration and acculturation).

My recommendation is therefore to study the role of identity in immigration, acculturation, and their consequences. This recommendation refers to research in three areas. The first area involves investigating the effects of immigration and acculturation on the identity development process. The second area involves examining the role of identity in protecting against the negative effects of intergenerational acculturation discrepancies. The third area

involves ascertaining the potential of identity to protect immigrants against the deleterious effects of acculturative stress.

### **Terrorism**

Terrorism has been a major social problem around the world for several decades. In the United States, terrorism has been widely recognized as an important threat only since the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. Broadly conceived, terrorism represents extreme legitimized violence against a perceived political or religious enemy. Although it is undertaken through violent destruction of individuals and landmarks, the ultimate goal of terrorism is to frighten a group or nation into submitting to one's demands (e.g., withdrawing from a specific region). If the target group or nation refuses to submit to the demands, then the terrorists believe that they have license to destroy that group or nation.

Some theoretical work has discussed the role of identity in terrorism. Huntington (1996), for example, argued that identity is at the forefront of the conflict between (a) modern societies based on individual freedoms and technological progress and (b) traditional societies based on strict adherence to religious principles. In some ways, terrorism is an outgrowth of collectivism taken to its extreme. For collectivist-oriented individuals, the group (e.g., family, nation, religion) takes precedence over the individual, such that threats to the group are more salient and more likely to elicit a defensive or protective response than are threats to the individual (Chen et al., 1998). Terrorism, however takes this process one step further. The terrorist becomes fused with the group he represents, so much so that he is willing to sacrifice his own life to advance the group's agenda and purposes (Weigert, 2003).

To understand how identity is relevant to terrorism, it may be useful to consider how and whom terrorist groups tend to recruit. First, terrorist groups tend to recruit adolescents and emerging adults, for whom identity issues are most salient. Second, terrorist groups tend to target for recruitment individuals who either (a) share their anti-Western ideals or (b) have been disenfranchised by Western societies and are in search of an identity. In Case (b), the terrorist group gives the person an identity and lends purpose to a previously unguided life. The cases of José Padilla, the Puerto Rican man arrested at the Chicago O'Hare International Airport for plotting a "dirty bomb" attack on Washington, D.C., and Richard Reid, the British man who attempted to detonate a shoe bomb on a transatlantic flight, may exemplify these principles. Both of these men had spent considerable time in prison and had been recruited into terrorism during their sentences. Both had lacked direction and had been involved in petty crimes (as is not uncommon among individuals

with severe identity confusion) prior to being recruited, and both became extremely fervently anti-American and pro-terrorist following their visits to terror training facilities in the Middle East. The process occurring in these men's identities appears to reflect Archer and Waterman's (1990) concept of appropriated foreclosure, in which an identity-confused person alleviates this confusion by completely adopting a group's ideals without question. Appropriated foreclosure may be especially dangerous because the person adopts a maximally collectivist position (i.e., defends the group even at her or his own expense) and appears to be under the control of the group onto whose ideals he or she has foreclosed.

Thus far, almost all of the literature exploring the role of identity in terrorism and terrorist groups has been theoretical in nature. Empirical research is necessary to substantiate the conclusions and hypotheses generated in these conceptual analyses. Although it is not conceivable that one could administer questionnaires or structured interviews to terrorists (such research would never pass a human subjects review committee), case studies and naturalistic observations of terrorist groups and of converts to terrorism may be especially useful and valuable. In particular, the processes by which identity-confused adolescents and emerging adults are recruited into terrorist groups and adopt the identities of these groups are in need of study. Additionally, identifying the characteristics of individuals most likely to be targeted for recruitment would be another important research aim. Identity interventions could then be designed for, and administered to, individuals who are most likely to be recruited into terrorist groups. These interventions could then reduce these individuals' vulnerability to the allure of terrorism. Such interventions could be delivered both in Western countries and in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, where terrorism is rampant.

My recommendation is therefore to conduct research examining the role of identity in extremist doctrines, terrorist ideologies, and terrorist groups' recruitment strategies. The ways in which terrorist groups assign identities to their members and the ways in which members adopt the values and beliefs of terrorist groups are in need of empirical study. To encourage prevention of terrorist recruitment, it is important to identify the identity-related characteristics that terrorist groups look for when recruiting.

### **General Recommendation: Conduct More Intervention Outcome Studies**

Within the past 15 years or so, identity researchers have begun to conduct interventions to promote identity development in adolescents and emerging adults. Although only a handful of identity intervention studies have been

published, these interventions have shown promise in helping adolescents and emerging adults to develop a sense of identity. However, identity intervention studies need to show that they can do more than simply increase participants' scores on identity questionnaires. They also need to show that they can promote positive outcomes, and reduce negative outcomes, that are important public health priorities. These outcomes include reductions in substance abuse, unsafe sexual behavior, psychological symptoms, and acculturative stress; improvements in school performance and relationship quality; and a decrease in vulnerability to recruitment by terrorist groups. Although promoting identity is an important goal in itself, this goal should be considered as a means toward improving the health of individuals, families, and the public as a whole.

### CONCLUSION

In this editorial essay, I have pointed to some important limitations of the identity literature and have suggested several strategies for addressing these limitations. Identity status-based research with largely White samples of university students may have been necessary to establish the basis for identity as an empirical construct, but it is now time to shift the focus of identity research toward fulfilling the promise with which Erikson established the identity construct. Erikson posited identity as a central component of positive psychological functioning, of avoiding problematic mental health and social outcomes, and of discerning one's place in the world. It is time for research on identity to match the applied and public health emphasis that Erikson attributed to the identity construct. Such an expansion in the focus of the identity literature may permit identity to make a maximal contribution to promoting good health, to improving people's quality of life, and to reducing the threat of terrorism. As someone I know once said, it is time for the grandness of identity research to catch up with the grandness of the theory from which it is derived.

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