Identity Around the World: An Overview

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Abstract

This chapter outlines Erik Erikson’s theory of identity, empirical operationalizations of this theory, and key assumptions that have characterized the study of identity in adolescence and emerging adulthood. It discusses the origins of psychosocial identity theories in North American cultural contexts and cross-cultural issues involved in using neo-Eriksonian identity models in other contexts. In particular, the chapter examines the individualist assumptions that underlie the neo-Eriksonian approach. The chapter concludes with a review of the other six chapters in this volume and of the countries on which these other chapters focus. © 2012 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.
Young people have long been expected to develop a sense of personal identity—that is, figuring out who they wish to be and what they wish to do with their lives. The task of identity development features prominently in the narratives and biographies of historical figures such as Martin Luther (Erikson, 1958) and Mohandas Gandhi (Erikson, 1969). Most young people are expected to decide what they stand for, what is important to them, what their life’s work will be, and with whom they want to share their lives. Moreover, the identity that one develops may not always be regarded as “positive” or “adaptive” by the individual or by those around her or him. Nonetheless, we argue that identity provides one’s life with a sense of purpose and direction (cf. Côté, 1993) and allows one to select those life alternatives that fit with the sense of self that one wishes to develop.

Erik Erikson (1950) was one of the first writers to develop a theory of identity. He posited identity development as a lifelong process—but one that comes to ascendance during the adolescent years. According to Erikson, adolescence was the time when young people were given opportunities to reflect on what career they would choose, what kind of social and romantic relationships they would enter into, and what values and beliefs they would hold. Erikson (1968) referred to this time of reflection as the psychosocial moratorium, where individuals were afforded opportunities to consider potential life choices without being expected to engage in full-time work, enter into committed romantic relationships, or become parents. The adolescent years, according to Erikson, were set aside for identity work.

In some parts of the world—especially the United States and Western Europe—the task of developing a sense of identity has been extended from the end of secondary school into the late teens and the 20s (Arnett, 2000, 2006, 2007). The switch from manufacturing to technological economies has eliminated, mechanized, or outsourced many of the entry-level jobs that young people once took following completion of their secondary education (Kalleberg, 2009). In the United States, the need for postsecondary education and advanced credentials as prerequisites for careers in a technological economy has led to exponential increases in college and university attendance. In 1959, approximately 2.4 million American students were enrolled as full-time students in postsecondary institutions; by 2010, that number had jumped to 12.7 million (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). This 430% increase is nearly six times the 72% increase in the total U.S. population during that same time span (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Although increases in university attendance are less pronounced in European countries, more informal means of postsecondary education—including but not limited to vocational and technical schools—have increased in prominence in many European countries (du Bois-Reymond, 2004).

The gap between completion of compulsory education and entry into adult roles has prompted the creation of a new life stage in many parts of
the world: emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). In many countries and regions, no longer does the majority of identity work occur in adolescence. Rather, emerging adulthood (roughly ages 18 to 25 in the United States; the upper bound of the emerging adult life stage varies across countries and across individuals) has come to represent an extension of Erikson’s psychosocial moratorium (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). Young people often spend their late teens and 20s exploring different college majors, traveling the world, engaging in sexual relationships, and experimenting with substance use (Arnett, 2005; Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, & Tanner, 2011).

Not surprisingly, whereas the life course was once guided by prescriptive norms regarding acceptable lifestyles, the increased individualization in Western cultural contexts has introduced alternative lifestyles that were not viewed as socially acceptable a generation ago. For example, cohabitation and permanent singlehood have replaced marriage as the personal lifestyle of choice for many young Americans and Europeans (Dykstra & Poortman, 2010; Wiik, 2009). In 2009, 47% of American women age 25 to 29 had never been married, compared to 27% in 1986 (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Corresponding numbers for ages 30 to 34 were 27% in 2009 versus 14% in 1986. In some cases, youth eventually settle down into traditional adult lifestyles, whereas in other cases, nontraditional lifestyles persist into the 30s and beyond.

Emerging adulthood has become ubiquitous across the majority of Western societies (see Buhl & Lanz, 2007; Nelson & Barry, 2005, for reviews). The removal of traditional, socially sanctioned markers of adulthood—such as uniform entry into marriage and full-time work almost immediately after completion of compulsory education—has left young people largely on their own to create pathways from adolescence into adult life (Côté, 2000). This is especially true in the United States, which does not have much of a safety net (e.g., universal health care, long-term unemployment benefits) for individuals who are unable to compete successfully for financial resources.

The removal of traditional markers of adulthood and of normative standards for the life course has increased the importance of individual exploration and consideration of the life path that one wants to follow. Consequently, as noted, in many Western nations, emerging adulthood now represents a time of identity exploration regarding the adult commitments that one will enact. Accordingly, we now turn to an exposition of the task of identity development in young people.

Structure of Identity Development

Although Erikson wrote extensively about identity development, he did so using clinical case studies, biographies of historical figures, and complex psychoanalytic concepts. None of these sources was easy to operationalize
for empirical research. As a result, it was necessary to develop a model of identity development on which a tradition of identity research could be built. Although a number of writers attempted to derive empirical models from Erikson’s writing, only Marcia’s (1966) identity status model has inspired an appreciable research literature. Marcia extracted from Erikson’s work the assumedly independent dimensions of exploration and commitment. *Exploration* refers to sorting through multiple alternatives in order to find a set of ideals that suits oneself (Grotevant, 1987), and *commitment* refers to adhering to one or more sets of identity choices (Marcia, 1988). Marcia divided exploration and commitment into “present” versus “absent” (or “high” versus “low”) and crossed these two dimensions to derive four identity statuses: *achievement* (commitments enacted following a period of exploration), *moratorium* (active exploration in the absence of strong commitments), *foreclosure* (committing to a set of ideals without much prior exploration), and *diffusion* (absence of commitments and of systematic exploration).

Marcia’s identity statuses have given rise to more than 45 years of theoretical and empirical work (Kroger & Marcia, 2011) and have inspired a wave of newer models that have further elucidated the ways in which young people develop and maintain a sense of who they are (e.g., Berzonsky, 2011; Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Luyckx, Soenens, & Goossens, 2006). Each of Marcia’s identity statuses has also been associated with a specific set of personality characteristics. Specifically, achievement is linked with balanced thinking and mature interpersonal relationships (Krettenauer, 2005); moratorium is linked with openness and curiosity (Luyckx, Soenens, & Goossens, 2006) but also with symptoms of anxiety and depression (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, & Rodriguez, 2009); foreclosure is linked with rigidly held commitments and with high but fragile self-esteem (Schwartz, Beyers, et al., 2011); and diffusion is linked with disinterest and with an apathetic or carefree lifestyle (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, & Vansteenkiste, 2005).

Marcia’s identity statuses were conceptualized as operating within a potentially limitless set of life domains. Most identity status measures have considered a fairly standard set of domains, including political ideology, religious beliefs, occupational goals, personal values, lifestyle preferences, choice of friends and dating partners, gender roles, family relationships, and recreational activities (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995; Bennion & Adams, 1986; Crocetti, Schwartz, Fermani, & Meeus, 2010; Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, et al., 2008). However, as Marcia (2001) notes, the set of domains referenced should match the population under study. For example, when studying early adolescents, domains such as politics, religion, and occupation are unlikely to be relevant; rather, domains such as physical appearance, athletic and academic competence, and popularity with peers might be more salient (Harter, 1999). In any case, there is abundant evidence that identity processes unfold unevenly.
across domains and that they should not be collapsed across domains (Goossens, 2001; Pastorino, Dunham, Kidwell, Bacho, & Lamborn, 1997).

Although Marcia’s four identity statuses have inspired a great deal of theoretical and empirical work, they have also drawn their share of criticism. Perhaps most prominently, early identity status research was used primarily to examine individual differences across status categories rather than to ascertain trajectories of identity processes or to investigate associations of identity processes and with psychosocial and health outcomes (Schwartz, 2001). As a result, what Erikson had posited as a dynamic and changing self-system was being examined as a static set of categories. In addition, the reduction of Erikson’s expansive theory to two processes and four statuses was regarded as overly simplistic and reductionistic (Côté & Levine, 1988, 2002). Finally, whereas Erikson had proposed identity as an interplay between the person and her or his social and cultural context, the focus of identity status theory and research was almost solely on the individual person, with little or no attention given to the external forces that might guide that individual’s identity development (van Hoof, 1999). In other words, the identity statuses framed identity as a largely internally driven process.

Schwartz (2001) reframed these criticisms as challenges for the field of identity research, and in the decade since that article was published, a number of extensions and expansions of the identity status model have been introduced. Luyckx and colleagues (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006; Luyckx et al., 2005) subdivided exploration and commitment into two processes apiece. Exploration was divided into exploration in breadth and exploration in depth, and commitment was divided into commitment making and identification with commitment. In so doing, Luyckx and colleagues cast identity development as an iterative and dynamic process, where commitments are formed through exploring alternatives in breadth and committing to one or more of the alternatives considered; and the commitments that one has made are then evaluated by exploring them in depth and, provided that they are viewed as fitting well with one’s existing sense of self, identifying with and integrating them into one’s self-concept. Meeus and colleagues (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, & Meeus, 2008; Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, & Meeus, 2010) have cast identity development as a dynamic interplay between commitment making and reconsideration of commitments, where the person enacts commitments and then reconsiders whether they fit with one’s sense of self or not.

Within both the Luyckx and Meeus models, chronically reconsidering, or hesitating to enact, identity commitments is associated with symptoms of anxiety and depression (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Luyckx et al., 2008; Schwartz, Klimstra, et al., 2011). Luyckx et al. (2008) introduced an additional identity dimension, ruminative exploration, which represents a maladaptively perfectionistic approach to exploration. More or
less, the person insists on making the perfect choice and winds up not making a choice at all. Chronic reconsideration of commitments leads to much the same outcome—a feeling of being “stuck” in the identity development process and not reaching a satisfactory resolution.

Although they appear to induce distress, reconsideration and ruminative exploration are part of the identity development process (at least in some Western societies). Identity development is a trial-and-error process where the person experiments with a series of career choices, relationship preferences, and belief systems (among other domains) before committing to a set of ideals that will be carried forward into adulthood. Moreover, because identity is a lifelong process, commitments are often revisited and reconsidered in adulthood (Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, & Kokko, 2005). Indeed, the “midlife crisis” is likely a revisiting of identity issues in middle adulthood (Freund & Ritter, 2009), where choices enacted in one’s 20s are no longer deemed viable or satisfactory by the individual.

Cultural and Cross-Cultural Issues in Identity Development

We should mention two additional challenges for the field of identity development that were not noted by Schwartz (2001). Both of these challenges involve culture. The first involves cross-ethnic diversity and comparisons, and the second involves cross-cultural comparisons.

Cross-Ethnic Diversity and Comparisons. From Marcia’s original research until the beginning of the 21st century, the vast majority of studies in identity status and related areas of personal identity used overwhelmingly White samples (Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross, 2006). As a result, we knew much more about White—and predominantly White American—adolescents and emerging adults than we did about similarly aged individuals from other ethnic groups. A number of writers (e.g., Oyserman & Destin, 2010; Phillips & Pittman, 2003; Yoder, 2000) have enumerated the challenges faced by immigrants and by members of minority groups, including inadequate educational resources, marginalization into low-socioeconomic and underresourced communities, and institutional discrimination. These challenges introduce a number of additional issues with which immigrant and minority individuals are often confronted when developing a sense of identity. At the very least, individuals from outside the cultural majority group in a given country or region generally must make sense of their membership in an ethnic minority group as well as in the larger society where they live. This sense of oneself as a member of a minority group is known as ethnic identity and represents an additional domain in which identity work must be conducted (Schwartz, 2005). Additionally, in many cases, membership in an ethnic minority group—especially when a person’s accent, physical features, and/or choice of apparel identify her or him as a minority group member—may result in
certain identity commitments becoming more difficult to implement. For example, Oyserman and Destin (2010) note that inner-city African American and Hispanic adolescents in the United States are often steered toward lower-paying careers and away from college, even in cases where their academic grades and skill sets are well matched for higher-status occupations. In some instances, economic realities, such as becoming a parent at an early age or needing to go to work to help meet family expenses, may preclude pursuit of identity commitments that require postsecondary education. Given that socioeconomic and other inequalities exert their strongest effects on individuals from minority groups (Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar, & Levin, 2004), studies focusing largely on Whites are likely to overlook or miss the additional identity challenges faced by members of minority groups.

It is important to note that the terms immigrants and minority group members are sometimes, but not always, synonymous with one another. Some immigrants, such as individuals migrating from one European Union nation to another (e.g., Italians or Germans in the United Kingdom), may be viewed similarly to members of the majority cultural group. Other immigrants, such as Mexicans in the United States or Turks in Germany, are often labeled as minorities and may therefore be treated quite differently from members of the majority cultural group. Finally, some minority group members are not immigrants at all—such as African Americans in the United States or Arabs in Israel—yet these individuals are most definitely regarded as minorities. Further, not all minority groups are treated equally in a given society; in the United States, some Hispanic subgroups are viewed as underachievers (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006), whereas many Asian Americans are thought of as a “model minority” that over-achieves in school, excels in scientific and technological professions, and avoids involvement in problematic behaviors (Qin, Way, & Mukherjee, 2008). American society may therefore afford many Asian Americans more identity opportunities than it affords many Hispanic Americans, even though the Hispanic and Asian American stereotypes may be largely inaccurate and may mask a great deal of within-group variability.

Whereas the personal identity literature has only recently begun to include large numbers of ethnic minority participants (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2005; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, & Rodriguez, 2009), issues of ethnic diversity are becoming increasingly important in many Western countries. Current projections indicate that ethnic minorities will make up one half of the United States population by 2050 (Cohn & Passel, 2008). In many European countries, declining birth rates among Whites coupled with mass immigration from, and high birth rates among immigrants from, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, are likely to result in Whites representing only half of these countries’ populations (Caldwell, 2008). Ethnic diversity, and its implications for personal identity development, are likely to become more, rather than less, important.
Cross-Cultural Comparisons. For most of the identity status model's life span, personal identity research was dominated by North American studies. Most of the original identity researchers were based either in the United States or in Canada, and as a result, we knew far more about identity development in Americans and Canadians than we did about young people in other parts of the world. Arnett (2008) has referred to this problem as the “neglected 95%” and has called for an increase in the representation of young people from other parts of the world in psychological research.

In the last 15 years or so, personal identity research has begun to take hold in Europe—predominantly in Belgium (Goossens, 2001; Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006), The Netherlands (Klimstra et al., 2010; Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999; Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijser, Schwartz, & Branje, 2010), Italy (Crocetti et al., 2010; Crocetti, Schwartz, Feramani, Klimstra, & Meeus, 2012), and Germany (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Haid, Seiffge-Krenke, Molinar, Ciairano, Güney Karaman, & Çok, 2010). With the increased prominence of the Internet, social networking mechanisms, electronic mail, and other forms of real-time communication, collaborations between North American and European identity researchers began to emerge. A small number of cross-cultural studies comparing European and United States samples have appeared since 1995 (e.g., Berzonsky, Macek, & Nurmi, 2003; Eryigit & Kerpelman, 2011; Schwartz, Adamson, Ferrer-Wreder, Dillon, & Berman, 2006; Taylor & Oskay, 1995). More recently, articles comparing different European countries on indices of identity have begun to appear in the literature (e.g., Crocetti et al., 2012). Conclusions from this growing body of work suggest that the structure of identity development is similar across countries but that identity processes (i.e., forms of exploration and commitment) are endorsed to different extents between and among countries. These findings have generally been explained in terms of differing developmental contexts across countries, including differences in societal expectations for adolescents and emerging adults, differences in the timing of young people's departure from the parental home, and differences in the timing of and processes underlying assumption of adult roles (e.g., Crocetti et al., in press; Ergiyit & Kerpelman, 2011; Schwartz et al., 2006).

Although European identity research has matured considerably to the point where it may be more methodologically sophisticated than American identity research (e.g., the two most prominent new identity measures were designed in Europe; Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Luyckx et al., 2005, 2008), identity research in other parts of the world is in its relative infancy. A small number of personal identity studies have been conducted in East Asia—and these studies have indicated that the structure of personal identity is not equivalent between American and East Asian young people (Berman, Yu, Schwartz, Teo, & Mochizuki,
2011; Ohnishi, Ibrahim, & Owen, 2001). Specifically, although commitment making operates similarly between East Asian and Western cultural contexts, the factor structure of exploration subscales did not fit the data well, suggesting that identity exploration may not represent the mechanism through which identity is developed in East Asian countries. Bosma and Kunnen (2001) have similarly proposed that identity is formed through a process of exploration in Western countries but through a process of imitation and identification in non-Western countries. Identity exploration involves an agentic, self-directed process that may not be consistent with the largely collectivist and group-oriented focus in many East Asian cultural contexts. Specifically, there is evidence that the “self” is regarded as equivalent to a self-contained person in the United States but is regarded as including important others in East Asia (Cross, Gore, & Morris, 2003; Suh, 2002). Individual agency and exploration may not fit with this collective sense of self in East Asian cultural contexts.

In sum, cross-national studies of identity processes have only recently begun to emerge, and cross-ethnic, within-country comparisons of identity processes have also been relatively rare (and largely restricted to North America). Moreover, the cross-ethnic and cross-national work conducted thus far has used an etic approach where models developed in one cultural context (e.g., identity status in the United States and Canada) are imported into other contexts. Even if the measures can be shown to operate equivalently across cultures, such a finding does not rule out the possibility that there may be additional and/or unique identity processes at work within specific cultural-historical contexts (for a discussion of emic cross-cultural construct and measurement development, see Alegría et al., 2004). For example, in multilingual societies such as Belgium, Switzerland, and parts of Canada, membership in a specific linguistic and within-nation cultural group may represent an additional domain of one’s personal identity (e.g., Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi, & Cree, 2004). Moreover, in cultural contexts such as the former East Germany and the former Iron Curtain countries, the current generation of emerging adults is among the first since World War II to have grown up without governmental repression and totalitarianism. However, lingering economic and cultural effects of the Cold War can still be found (e.g., Macek, Bejček, & Vaníčková, 2007; van Hoorn & Maseland, 2010). Specifically, the parents of the current generation of emerging adults in these contexts did grow up under government repression, and the family dynamics between these parents and their Westernized children may affect these youths’ identity development. Further, the transition from communist to free-market economies has been smoother and more effective for some countries than for others. Including these political dynamics within the study of identity in the former Soviet Union and its former satellite countries—as well as in countries that have experienced major shifts away from government-
sponsored repression toward specific ethnic groups, such as South Africa, Brazil, and Peru (e.g., Norris et al., 2008)—may be important in understanding the lived realities of young people in these countries and regions.

**Toward a Global Understanding of Personal Identity.** It is for these reasons that study of identity is ready to move toward a more global, emic understanding of how young people develop a sense of themselves within particular national, political, historical, and ethnic contexts. Because the cross-ethnic and cross-cultural study of personal identity processes is in its relative infancy, one of the first tasks for the field is to understand precisely how identity operates within a diverse set of national contexts. As mentioned, the identity status model was developed in the United States (and to a lesser extent in Canada), and the model’s primary assumptions—such as the postulate that an agentic process of exploration followed by the enactment of personally chosen commitments is the “best” way to develop a sense of identity—are rooted strongly within these heavily individualistically oriented cultural contexts and may not apply in highly collectivist contexts (such as East Asia; Berman et al., 2011). Although exploration and commitment processes have been found to operate similarly between the United States and some European countries, and between some pairs of European countries, these findings do not preclude the existence of additional identity-related processes or contextual influences that may operate differently in some countries than in others.

An additional issue, as we alluded to, is the intersection of personal and cultural identities in international migrants and members of ethnic minority groups. Although all individuals and groups subscribe to a particular “culture,” many members of cultural majority groups take their cultural identities for granted (Devos & Heng, 2009; Schwartz, Vignoles, Brown, & Zagefka, in press). For example, individuals of European descent in the United States, Canada, Australia, and most European countries likely do not spend time thinking of themselves as “White American,” “White Canadian,” “White Australian,” and so on. However, for most ethnic minority individuals, and for individuals who have moved from one country to another, cultural concerns may indeed represent part of one’s personal identity. Personal identity research, both within the identity status model and within its extensions, has rarely considered the role of culture—and for whom culture may be more versus less salient. Within a given nation, are culture and ethnicity more important for some immigrant and minority groups than for others? And within specific immigrant and minority groups, are there variables that help to determine for whom culture and ethnicity are most likely to be important? And finally, how do differences in identity processes, and in their effects on psychosocial and health outcomes, between cultural majorities and minorities operate similarly or dissimilarly across nations?
The Present Volume

The answers to the questions just posed require a new line of theorizing and empirical research. Other subfields of identity—especially ethnic and cultural identity—have been widely examined in international and cross-cultural contexts (e.g., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006), and the variables that account for mean and structural differences across nations and ethnic groups have been identified (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2011; Owe et al., in press). This is not the case for personal identity, however. This volume is intended to highlight similarities and differences in personal identity processes across seven countries: Italy, Sweden, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, China, and Japan (Belgium and The Netherlands are covered in a single chapter). Although there is not a separate chapter on the United States, comparisons between each target country and the United States are implicit, given that the identity status model was developed in the United States.

The focus on European and East Asian countries rests on the flourishing personal identity literature in Western Europe and on the beginnings of personal identity work in East Asia. Moreover, European and East Asian nations provide examples of contexts where the individualistic assumptions of the identity status model hold to greater versus lesser degrees. The countries selected for inclusion in this volume also provide examples of the effects of multiple linguistic traditions (Belgium), reunification and post–Cold War economic and social changes (Germany), greatly delayed transitions to adulthood (Italy), heavily socialist economic systems where equality of outcomes is strongly emphasized (Sweden), and globalization and modernization (China and Japan) on personal identity processes. The various countries highlighted also differ in terms of the volume of immigrants that they receive and in the proportion of the population that belongs to ethnic minority groups. The volume is therefore intended to serve as a starting point for a theoretical and empirical literature on the different antecedents, manifestations, and correlates of personal identity processes across various national contexts. Our hope is that the volume will lead to two subsequent developments. The first is a series of qualitative and quantitative empirical studies on personal identity development, from an emic (insider) perspective, within each of the targeted countries, to ascertain the extent to which the identity status model and its extensions accurately portray the development of personal identity within each of the highlighted countries. The second is further theoretical work, using an expanded set of countries from additional regions of the world (e.g., North and sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Central and South America, the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, and South Asia). Ultimately, our hope is that a major study, with a large number and wide variety of nations and regions, will emerge as a part of the literature spurred by this volume. Such studies have been fairly common in the field of cultural and...
The remaining chapters in this volume detail identity processes, and the historical and cultural contexts in which those processes are embedded, within each of the specific countries that we are including. For each country, chapter authors outline the national and cultural contexts for identity development, including specific historical or political forces that guide young people’s identity formation. Each chapter also covers the areas of identity development that may differ between majority group members and members of immigrant or minority groups.

In Chapter 2, Theo A. Klimstra, Koen Luyckx, and Wim H. J. Meeus outline the process of identity development in Belgium and The Netherlands. These nations are grouped together (along with Luxembourg) as the Low Countries. The majority of Dutch and Belgian people speak Dutch as their first language, although Belgium also has a large French-speaking population (and, like most multilingual countries, faultlines exist between the two language groups). The Netherlands and Belgium (especially Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region) are among the most open and welcoming parts of Europe, and accordingly, these countries are home to large immigrant populations—mostly from Mediterranean or Caribbean backgrounds. The Netherlands and Belgium are home to the most recently developed personal identity models, and the ways in which these models reflect identity development in the Low Countries is discussed in the chapter.

In Chapter 3, Inge Seiffge-Krenke and Marja-Lena Haid discuss identity development in Germany. Germany is a fascinating example of the intersection of collective guilt (for the Holocaust), rapid social change (since the country was reunified in 1991), and mass immigration (primarily involving Turks). There is evidence that, up to seven years after reunification (1998), differences persisted in the extent to which emerging adults in the former East and West Germany preferred gender-typical career choices versus appearing to make “freer” choices (Christmas-Best & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2001). Moreover, Rensmann (2004) has found that many Germans—even those born long after the Holocaust—nonetheless felt some sense of guilt or shame for what their country had done. The chapter explores the effects of these collective processes on young Germans’ identity development.

In Chapter 4, Laura Ferrer-Wreder, Kari Trost, Carolyn Cass Lorente, and Shahram Mansoory explore the Swedish context for identity development. Like the other Nordic countries, Sweden is heavily socialist, with a clear emphasis on equality of outcomes across individuals (in contrast to capitalist societies, which emphasize equality of opportunity but not of outcomes). Individuals pay the majority of their income in taxes but are offered a rich array of social services, including free education through the doctorate. Research has suggested that the emphasis on equality of
outcomes may limit the extent to which young Swedes engage in active identity exploration (Schwartz, Adamson, et al., 2006), but it is also possible that the large amount of social services allow Swedish adolescents and emerging adults to search for their “ideal” careers with less concern for making a living. Further, Sweden is a relative newcomer to immigration, suggesting that we know fairly little about immigrant adjustment and its effects on identity development in the Swedish context.

In Chapter 5, Elisabetta Crocetti, Emanuela Rabaglietti, and Luigia Simona Sica discuss personal identity development in Italy. Like Sweden, Italy has only recently begun to receive large numbers of immigrants. Perhaps the most striking feature of the Italian context for identity development is the lengthened transition to adulthood, during which young people often reside at home with their parents until age 30 and beyond (Aassve, Billari, Mazzuoco, & Ongaro, 2002). Research has suggested that young Italians may postpone personal identity work well beyond adolescence and perhaps into their mid to late 20s (Crocetti et al., 2012). The chapter discusses the implications of this extended emerging adulthood for Italian identity development.

In Chapter 6, Min Cheng and Steven L. Berman outline personal identity development in China. China is undergoing somewhat of a transformation from a traditional, closed society to a more globalized, open economic power. Many young Chinese people, including many young women, have moved from rural areas to cities in search of better-paying and more satisfying work (Jensen, Arnett, & McKenzie, 2011). Although Chinese society is still largely collectivist and based in Confucian principles such as filial piety, saving face, and humility (Yeh & Bedford, 2003), modernization has clearly taken hold. The chapter discusses the tension between traditional and global forces in guiding identity development among young Chinese people.

In Chapter 7, Kazumi Sugimura and Shinichi Mizokami discuss personal identity development in Japan. Like China, Japan has been transforming from a traditional society into more of a Westernized context—but this process has been under way in Japan for more than a generation (Matsumoto, 2007). Japanese society has been changed through the development of innovative technology and through international business ventures, both of which have led many young Japanese people to adopt Westernized identities so that they can compete in the global marketplace.

In sum, this volume illustrates the ways in which national and cultural contexts influence personal identity development in a variety of European and East Asian countries. Studying the effects of national-level processes on personal identity requires a diverse array of national contexts—and this volume is intended to summarize these processes and to set the stage for empirical work that will compare these (and other) national contexts empirically. We hope that our volume serves as a catalyst.
for a major expansion and integration within the personal identity literature.

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Identities Around the World


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