

Chapter 2

Identity

The development of an identity is the first and most formidable task of entering and negotiating adulthood. Emerging and young adults in a postindustrial society such as the United States face a global environment that is linked in cyberspace, increasingly complex, demanding, and constantly changing. The future is uncertain, and for some, replete with choices and possibilities. Rules are less clear and more contextual, and there is less institutional guidance pointing to clear developmental pathways. The current context demands from this group greater maneuverability, flexibility, and adaptability (Savickas 1997; Porfeli and Savickas 2012).

Emerging and young adults are well aware that they are living in a different environmental context compared to past generations. Boomer generation adults, positioned in the past to offer them tangible and emotional support, may no longer be able to help, bewildered as they are by the same circumstances. Due to lack of institutional supports and parental expertise regarding how to best navigate these new contingencies, a key question, "...who am I, and where am I going?" feels overwhelming to many emerging and young adults, particularly given an environment that leaves it up to the individual to figure it all out (Cote 2000, p. 127).

Identity development takes place in a historical and cultural frame of reference. For example, whereas symptoms identified with hysteria were manifested in Victorian times under conditions of emotional repression, identity issues now seem paramount. Today, the limitless representations of self and career for emerging and young adults immeasurably complicates the task of developing a coherent identity. Although the diagnosis of borderline personality disorder is controversial and sex-role linked, it is currently one of the most popular diagnoses in psychiatry, an umbrella term that covers a multitude of symptoms, all pointing to individuals who are emotionally needy, scattered, and who present an uncertain self (Cote 2000). The diagnosis is symptomatic of our fluid, ever-changing context, a context that challenges the abilities of the individual to internalize a coherent self (Sue et al. 1998).

Although the task of navigating who one is has always been complex, the age in which we live in has made it harder. Cote (2000) takes the position that given the lack of adequate structure and support, “people tend to be confused or lose their sense of place in society” (p. 136). Abundance of choice is “problematic” and emerging adults struggle individually. Cote asserts: “in late modern society ... an increasing number of people seem to become ‘adults’ (in terms of age) who are ‘immature’ in comparison to adults of earlier periods. This all seems ‘normal’ now” (p. 136).

Many emerging adults sense that the times they live in give them leeway to judge themselves by a different standard from prior generations, if only to make their quest more bearable, and especially if the construct of identity itself is undergoing a transformation. There has long been a rich literature on identity development that addresses the period just prior to our focus, that of adolescence. Identity development is neither immutable nor stable; it is primarily dependent on external contingencies and prone to change (Lipford et al. 2005; Zunker 2006). It is a multidimensional construct, characterized by shifts in the sense of self. We know that identity may vary over time and across settings (McCarn and Fassinger 1996; Tanner 2006). Moreover, changes in identity do not necessarily represent a switching of fundamental values, but are responses to expectations and constraints of particular environments (Hays 2008). Individuals find themselves needing time to reroute paths and reconfigure meanings when chaos and loss emerge from the unknown.

Josselson (1996) provides a cogent discussion of identity, and reinforces the notion that we are responsive to our environment, and capable of assuming a self that is nuanced, organized, and informed by environmental expectations and contingencies:

We are not the same in all regions of our lives, and how we make meaning may change across situations or over time. Identity is what integrates our own diversity, gives meaning to the disparate parts of ourselves, and relates them to one another. Identity is how we interpret parts of ourselves, and relate them to one another. Identity is how we interpret our own existence and understand who we are in our world. (p. 30)

Marcia (1966) identified four identity groups based on the theoretical underpinnings of Erikson (1956): Foreclosures, Identity Achievements, Moratoriums, and Identity Diffusions. In order to make these four groups “more descriptive” and “less evaluative,” Josselson (1996) changed the names of these four groups to Guardians, Pathmakers, Searchers, and Drifters, respectively (p. 275). Although Josselson’s findings are based on research with female participants, she concludes that extensive research with both males and females, over close to 30 years, reveals that these four groups can be reliably assessed and “share predictable personality characteristics and ways of behaving” (p. 36).

Guardians tend to execute a life plan that they mapped out in their childhood, or were mapped out by their parents. They are the carriers of culture, revealing the highest level of obedience to authority, respect for rules, and the lowest levels of anxiety when compared to the other three groups (Josselson 1996). They embrace tradition as they navigate their lives and their lived experience reflects the belief: “This is how I am because it’s how I was raised, or how I’ve always been” (p. 35).

Pathmakers prefer action to looking inward. They love to explore, but not without coming to a resolution. On arrival at an identity, their commitment has to be congruent with values they have already acquired, and “make identity commitments on their own terms” (p. 35). They struggle with options, and then make their choices, although they decide with less conviction than Guardians. Their lived experience reflects the belief: “I’ve tried out some things, and this is what makes most sense for me” (p. 35).

Searchers engage in exploration, but are in a period of struggle, unclear about how to execute perceived available choices. Their lived experience reflects, “I’m not sure about who I am or want to be, but I’m trying to figure it out” (p. 35). Most Searchers choose only after an extended period of self-examination and experimentation and remain aware of their internal conflict and struggle.

Drifters are most delayed in structuring their identity. Wary of committing themselves, their choices can be capricious. Drifters have difficulties discerning their desires and dreams, and these desires and dreams are ever shifting. They struggle to extract a sense of self from their own chaos, but often are in the position of being an actor in someone else’s plan (p. 241). Their lived experience reflects postponement: “I don’t know what I will do or believe, but it doesn’t matter too much right now” (p. 36). Their struggle is most often a solitary effort, characterized by a paucity of support from others. Searchers and Drifters can be easily understood in the context of a society in which the appearance of multitude of paths forward may as easily dissolve into a mirage.

It is important to note that the identified four identity groups are not fixed, and may shift over time; they are not etched in stone. Given the complexity and nuance of lived experience, many can be seen as fitting into more than one category, with significant overlap. The categories as presented are on a continuum without fixed boundaries. While some individuals may remain in one group, others may enter and exit the identified categories over time (Waterman 1999). Critics such as Belsky (2010) have pointed to the reality that individuals may identify with one group in one area (i.e., interpersonal relationships), but in another domain may identify with another (i.e., career choice, religiosity). In other words, placing people in a single group, especially given the negative value judgments surrounding the categories of Drifter and Guardian, do not augment the usefulness of the model (Kroger 2000).

It is also important to recognize the instability that is characteristic of this developmental period (Montgomery 2005; Shulman et al. 2005). For example, according to the Office for National Statistics, 3.3 million, 20 to 34-year-old lived with their parents in 2013. Since 1996, the number of emerging and young adults, 20- to 34-year old, living at home increased by 25 %. The age group most likely to live with their parents were those in their early 20s (49 %), (a percentage that rose from 42 % in 2008), followed by 25- to 29-year-old (21 %), and for 34-year-old the number of young adults living at home decreased significantly (8 %). There is extensive variability with respect to individual trajectories. Participants ranging in age from 17 to 27 reported alternating periods of increasing and decreasing dependency, in large part due to financial constraints linked to the economic context.

Identity and Group Membership

Group identity informs the process of identity formation (Phinney 2006). While meaningful discussion of identity needs to recognize the influences of race, gender, social class, ethnicity, religious orientation, sexual orientation, and disability and how they intersect, the literature is evolving and advances in the past decade have been made (Schwartz et al. 2005, 2013; Syed et al. 2013). bell hooks (as cited by Phan et al. 2005, p. 310) discusses models of identity development and notes that they have not sufficiently incorporated cultural influences and have understated the effects of discrimination and oppression on identity development.

In homogenous contexts, group identity exploration may not express itself as a primary concern (Phinney 2006). In more heterogeneous and global contexts, individuals are increasingly likely to explore issues related to group identity and the negotiation of self in relation to other groups. This is particularly true if they have encountered stigma and discrimination, realities that block access to resources, and to personal and political power. Temperamental style, personality characteristics, level of education, phenotype, and the degree of group discrimination individuals have encountered are variables identified by Phinney as important in determining how likely and the degree to which individuals will explore issues related to group identity:

With regard to ethnic identity, some people feel a strong need to belong to a group; they may seek out people who share their ethnic background and obtain information about their ethnic heritage as a way of developing a place to belong. Others feel less need to belong or else fulfill the need within a different context, such as family or friends. Experiences of being treated stereotypically or discriminated against, or being asked to label oneself ethnically, can be strong motivators of exploration, regardless of the larger context. (p. 130)

Harrison (1995) provides further clarity in terms of understanding the relationship between identity development and cultural group memberships. All individuals seek an identity, “a specific individuated personhood” (p. 379). Identity includes an “idiosyncratic constellation of qualities in each of us that persists over time,” and is context dependent, and “multifaceted” (p. 379). Among individuals belonging to marginalized communities (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer men and women), exposure to stigmatization, prejudice, guilt, and shame are likely to lead to the incorporation, integration, and expression of these indignities. A response to these experiences provides opportunities for an identity to develop in opposition to bigotry and resentment (p. 379). Moreover, it is important to recognize the intersection and interrelationships of cultural group memberships such as race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, particularly among individuals with “multiple oppressive identities” (Constantine 2002, p. 211).

While it is critical to acknowledge the significance of cultural influences and the isms associated with these influences (i.e., racism, sexism), it is also important not to overgeneralize, stereotype, and confine one group of individuals to a

specific limiting narrative. For example, hooks (1996), states that in order “to understand the complexity of African American girlhood we need more work that documents that reality in all its variations and diversity. ...There is no one story of African American girlhood” (p. 13). Above all, we need to see and incorporate the other as he/she is located in idiosyncratic cultural contexts, and pull together these dynamic meaning systems. Responding to projections by others, a Black female emerging adult expresses it this way: “everyone sees what they want to see. But no one seems to want to see me” (Williams 2005, p. 279). Encountering the other includes seeing and experiencing the other, and embracing the complexities, the contradictions, and the nuances.

Agency and Identity

Schwartz et al. (2005) investigated the relationship between agency and identity across three American ethnic groups (non-Hispanic Whites, non-Hispanic Blacks, and Hispanics). They evaluated differences in identity indices between clusters of participants organized according to patterns of agenetic personality scores. The results revealed few ethnic mean differences in the indices of agency and identity. Agency is related to exploration, varying degrees of commitment and choice, but it is not related to closure and conformity. Predictably, agency is negatively related to avoidant and aimless behavior. The authors conclude:

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), Cote and Levine (2002) and Marcia (1966). More specifically, this finding supports (Cote's 2000; Cote and Levine 2002) contention that agenetic functioning is an important component of individualized identity development and, hence of effective adaptation to postindustrial societies, in emerging adulthood. (p. 222)

What appears to be key is [one's] ability to capitalize on the relatively unstructured and unguided task of forming an identity in contemporary American society (p. 222).

Across all three groups, emerging adults who evidenced commitment to a set of goals, values, and beliefs were able to cope with and “counteract” the pernicious effects of lack of structural supports (Schwartz et al. 2005, p. 223). In other words, these commitments served as protective buffers that enabled successful transitioning to adulthood. It is important to note that the conclusions are based on a sample of private high school students. The results are context specific and generalization to other high school settings such as public schools or to older emerging and young adults would be problematic.

Schwartz et al. (2005) state that although the range of alternatives available to emerging adults (e.g., career paths, romantic attachments, and worldviews) has expanded, the support that society as a whole used to provide for identity formulation is evaporating. Accordingly, if emerging and young adults are to make enduring life commitments (e.g., romantic commitments, career choices), they must first undertake the psychological tasks of individually forming a stable and

viable identity that can guide and sustain these commitments, particularly given the replacement of community-oriented policies and production-based lifestyles by market-oriented policies and consumption-based lifestyles (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). Emerging and young adults, high in self-efficacy, who proactively negotiate the formation of identity are more likely to negotiate for social resources and position (Schwartz et al. 2005).

In summary, individuals have many discrete selves and the search for a solitary purpose or unidimensional identity is foolhardy. However, there appears to be idiosyncratic qualities in each of us that persist over time. There are many narratives, many stories that represent who we are, and growth is a process of “rewriting, revising, and interweaving these narratives” (Josselson 1996, p. 256). If a life lived mostly in the ideologically contested and economically expansive twentieth century did not challenge the concept of a unidimensional identity enough, one seeking to define himself/herself at the beginning of the twenty-first century encounters significant complexity unimaginable only a generation before.

Technology, a pervasive crucible of identity formation, will continue to furnish the toolbox of emerging and young adults—and those younger—with the means to access realms of experience otherwise closed to them, or simply to clone versions of their emerging identities and let them loose in cyberspace. The actor Franco (2013) notes that manipulated and multiform “avatars” of the self, or “selfies,” instantly communicate any aspect of identity that comes into focus in the moment. Above all, according to Franco, they elicit attention and attention is power. This implies that when it comes to representations of the self, sheer presence is more important than content, or consistency. The placement of images everyone can see need no longer be determined by events, talents, and capacities; rather it can be a by-product of the identity formation process itself.

Disseminating these versions of self is an interactive process. Instant peer global feedback might come in the form of a post, an invitation to chat, or to “like” the image, each with unpredictable effects on the development of identity. Notions of the image, formulated after the fact as the number of images exploded in consumer culture generations ago, are not new to the conversation. What is continually expanding are the number and variety of technological venues where possible selves can be developed, honed, and given a trial run. Chapter 4 will explore the confluence of identity formation and technology in greater depth.

A Diversity of Paths: Emily, Ryan, Tracey, Sergio, and Lily

Emerging and young adults compose their lives in myriad ways, in part reflecting their perceived freedom and the lack of clearly demarcated social norms (Tanner 2006; Schwartz et al. 2013). As suggested by Arnett (2006), absence of strict codes of behaviors creates a context in which emerging and young adults feel freer to explore and expand their search for identity:

Social control and social norms set boundaries for what is acceptable and punish behavior that is outside the boundaries. When the boundaries are broad, as they are in emerging adulthood, a wider range of individual differences is allowed expression, on the basis of a wide range of individual tendencies and preferences (see Arnett 1995). ...Because of their freedom from social control and the lack of social norms for the 20s, emerging adulthood is the most volitional period of life, the time when people are most likely to be free to follow their own interests and desires, and those interests and desires lead them in an exceptionally wide range of directions. (p. 15)

The context described by Arnett creates an environment for exploration of possibilities. Emily, Ryan, Tracey, and Sergio personify the multifaceted, subtle, and diverse ways emerging and young adults are negotiating the dynamic process of developing an identity. Sergio provides a context for understanding the immigration process and how it intersects with identity development.

Emily

Emily is a 31-year-old, single female, with a degree in environmental science. Her 20s have been a collection of adventures: she has sailed around the world twice, working on ships that allow her to make use of her training and expertise as a research scientist. She has pursued time-limited projects, typically on boats that have taken her to a range of work sites, including the Galapagos Islands, Hawaii, and Alaska. Emily's sense of self is informed by a lifelong commitment to learning and exploration. She has spent 2 years working as a lecturer on a recreational boat, as well as 2 years teaching English in a more formal context to students in Japan.

Emily speaks to the importance of friendships and family and how she creates family given her peripatetic existence:

My sister and I are exact opposites. She and I are the ying and yang of the family. My sister sees family as not being important to me. [That is not the case]. I am able to create family where I go. I consider the friendships I make, family members, whereas for my sister, immediate family is her focus. She does not have friends outside of family. Friendship is much more important to me. My friends' families embraced me as a kid. [Once I started working], I never come home for Thanksgiving. I have kept that tradition of spending time with other people's families, depending on where my friends are, and where I am in the world. What I have had for the past years are incredible experiences, but I need money to survive. I don't need a lot.

Emily thrives on work opportunities that provide for growth, adventure, and freedom. Satisfying her intellect, immersing herself in scenarios where she is forced to adapt, learn, and grow is consistent with her view of herself:

I have so much freedom. My work life is what I make it. The positions I hold have vague outlines for my responsibilities. So for example, on the boat, I was required to teach four 45-minute classes a day. But the atmosphere encourages you to do whatever you want based on your interests. So I was giving environmental lectures. I did a series. I coached a basketball team, taught kickboxing, letter-writing workshops. I worked 12 h a day, [and I was] only required to teach for four hours.

Personal freedom is a value that Emily cherishes. Her parents married in their early 20s and raised a family soon thereafter. Although satisfied, they conveyed to Emily a sense of regret for not having had the time and money to travel and pursue their respective interests. Emily's mother was incapacitated with a back injury during most of Emily's adolescence, positioning her as the major caretaker of the family. Perhaps Emily's need to explore and interact with a global world, embrace difference and diversity, is related to her adolescence, given that she was confined by her premature role of caretaker for a family of five. Personal freedom is a key to Emily's view of herself: "knowing that I can do anything, having the freedom, knowing that I can do anything anywhere, and to do it alone as well, is important."

Emily thrives in the environment she has chosen for herself. She is emotionally and intellectually drawn to growth-enhancing experiences. Adversity is framed by Emily as a learning opportunity, and overcoming adversity is core to Emily's sense of self:

If I am not happy, I immediately come up with a list to figure out what it is that I need to do to make me happier. For example, the work I did in Galapagos, I was working with all Spanish speakers. That was quite hard on me to camp on a desert island with people I could not communicate with very well. But it was really up to me. I really studied and made an effort to communicate, and at the end, I had made lifelong friendships. At the end, I was able to understand, understand Spanish I should say. The fact that there is a challenge, where I have to do something, that I can learn as a person and grow, that draws me.

Family and friendships are critical to Emily's view of herself, but she manages these important domains in a nontraditional way. When asked how she would rate herself in terms of overall personal satisfaction (on a scale from one to ten, ten indicating maximal satisfaction, she rates herself as close to ten):

The downside, I make these really close friends for a short period of time, for three to four months, and then we go our own separate ways. I keep in touch with people I meet through e-mail and visit them again and again. However it would be nice to stay long enough to keep those friendships for more than a few months.

When asked about friendships and how she sustains them in the long term, Emily states:

Some dwindle, some don't. There will be 10–20 people [on a project that I will connect with]. We will get along and feel really close. When we part, we all write to each other. After a year, four or five friends stay in the circle, and after five years, I might keep in touch with one or two of the most important people. My group of friends is the one or two of the groups that I have had. [However], if I knocked at the door [referring to the original circle of friends], I am sure they would let me in, but I don't keep in touch with them on a regular basis. My connections are sporadic. I might write for a week every day and then not for three weeks. My closest friends would hear from me once a month at least.

When asked how she would rewrite the story of her personal life, Emily says:

There are a couple of guys I would not have dated (laughs). Other than that, I wish I had more time. I wish that I spent more time just hanging out with friends. At times, I get very focused on my projects and I should socialize more and work less.

Emily does not have a clear sense of what her future holds. When asked how she envisions her life ten years from now, she states:

I'm not so good at envisioning the future. I could be doing the same thing I am doing now, or I could be inspired and go back to school and get a Ph.D. and be in a profession. It could go anywhere. I don't think I would have guessed what would have happened from graduation to now. I never guess the future. I will still be in connection with many of my friends and make new ones.

With respect to intimate relationships, Emily has not constructed a distinct vision, though she thinks there is a good possibility that she will raise a child as a single parent. Her intimate relationships have changed based on these revised expectations:

I think I exhibit a lot of the same behaviors time after time. The biggest change, in my earlier 20s, I knew I could date people and neither one of us would be serious. And then as I get older, I still may not be serious, it seems like relationships seem to have more purpose. I don't like going into a relationship knowing that someone is looking for a wife. It puts unnecessary pressure on it. So I think my behavior is more cautious now, whereas before I would say sure for a date or two [when asked to go out], now I would not bother so much unless I was really interested.

Emily has chosen a less traditional path, one that is informed by her need for exploration, growth experiences, and a connection to a larger global world. Ryan, in contrast, has chosen a path that earlier generations would find more familiar, laying a foundation that includes consistency in his multiple roles.

Ryan

Ryan is a 26-year-old married scientist, who has a clear sense of where he is and where he wants to be professionally and personally. His love of tinkering with computers as a child ("inventing"), as well as his respect for the creative process, has blossomed into a career as a research scientist. He has channeled this love of inventing to his current job, whereby he is involved with other researchers in executing and testing new inventions for the marketplace. Ryan has been married for 2 years. His wife, an accountant, has a clearly articulated life plan, a plan that Ryan jokingly states, "was conceived in the womb."

Currently, Ryan is relatively happy in his career, as well as in his home life. He continues to grow professionally, entertaining the possibility of starting his own business. Economic concerns are in the forefront for Ryan. He has accrued significant debt from his undergraduate and graduate degrees. Although he and his wife generate a substantial combined income, he does not foresee home ownership before having children, a shared goal. His future includes assuming most of the financial responsibility for his wife and family. He hopes to have two children by age 35. Ryan also mentions the possibility of having to help support his two parents when they retire.

Ryan is relatively satisfied in his professional and personal life (on a scale of 1–10, Ryan rates his overall satisfaction professionally and personally an 8.5). His life is comparatively regimented and routinized, and he wishes that he had more time for leisure. Given the couple's significant work demands, weekends are filled with errands and responsibilities. Ryan laments that he does not have sufficient time to “hang out” with his college friends and misses those associations. Although he plans on reconnecting with them at some time in the future, he has not done so to date. He thinks about the future in a larger context, and is concerned about what he perceives as pressing social issues:

I wonder if we are going to be the generation that will have to grapple with the world's biggest problems- global warming, transportation, social security. There are a lot of issues we will have to grapple with. My generation is self-centered for a reason. We never felt that the institutions were there for us. Long-term jobs and pensions are not there. Social security is going to disappear. You know what? I have to take care of myself. I feel screwed in my 20s. The Baby Boomers, their gain is my loss.

Ryan states the above in a matter of fact way, belying the possibility of anger toward his parents' generation, the Baby Boomers, for being irresponsible and leaving his generation with escalating problems that should have been addressed. While feeling burdened, he also has faith in his generation, reaffirming their competence, creativity, and energy.

Tracey

Tracey is a 33-year-old Black, married, female, with a 1-year-old son, and second child on the way. After graduating from an elite college, Tracey took a series of low-paying jobs (secretary, receptionist) that barely paid her bills. Her expectations were “pretty low,” and at the time, she was not thinking about “personal or career development.”

I really had a hard time in college... I did not have expectations of what my future would be like. I did not have a vision. I could not see a future. And I think it was easy to not think about it. My parents were not saying come home and figure yourself out. There was an attitude of there's time, you are young, and you need to figure things out.

At age 26, triggered by a turning point in a relationship, Tracey broke the cycle of low-paying jobs that held little personal satisfaction with the help of a therapist. She confronted a dysfunctional relationship in which she was physically abused. Tracey had been living with a heroin-addicted man, Ben, for 2 years, who was stealing money from her to maintain his habit. Previous attempts by Tracey to leave him, escalated to Ben attempting suicide and promising to change, which in turn left her clinging to possibilities and hope for the relationship. She sent him “back on a plane to his mother,” during a violent episode, when she realized that she would not be able to “rescue him and that she needed to rescue herself.”

The loss of her therapist to cancer also sparked a crisis for Tracey and mobilized her toward action. She remarks, “I didn't know what to do with myself.

I didn't have much direction. You don't know how much time you have to do something and I always had an interest in government."

Tracey returned to her "roots," setting up an apartment with her sister, entered graduate school in the field of government, and took a job at an insurance company to support herself. She sought therapy with a Black therapist who helped her come to terms with herself as a woman of color. With help from her therapist, she explored feelings of alienation and not belonging while growing up in a relatively privileged neighborhood, feelings that were replicated in her elite college experience. Tracey summarizes her experience in therapy as helping her to understand and accept herself in context. She was able to reflect on her experience of being marginalized and struggled with "the complex interplay of racist, sexist, classist...oppression" she had experienced (Williams 2005, p. 282). It was the first time Tracey began to think about a career versus a job: "Prior to graduate school, my expectations were pretty low. I would make enough money to support myself, would not be too bored, but I was not thinking about career development, professional development, or personal development."

Tracey completed her degree in government, and decided to enroll in a Ph.D. program in Counseling Psychology, while working to support herself. She successfully completed her doctorate in Counseling Psychology as well as a clinical postdoctoral internship. Her clinical experiences suggested that she had not found an optimal fit with respect to her career choice. Tracey worked in a clinical setting that included crisis management, a demanding on-call schedule that left her feeling overwhelmed, overscheduled, and emotionally depleted.

At age 29, Tracey met a very supportive, nurturing man, whom she married a year later. She currently has a 1-year-old child, and one on the way. She describes her husband as kind, stable, and committed to family. Tracey is struggling with her choice to stay at home and mother her soon to be two children. She fluctuates between assuming a reassuring stance, and, at more vulnerable moments, a more anxious one that focuses on her identity as a professional woman:

It will work out. I have always worked it out before, and the path will become clear when the time is right, that is my healthy zen side speaking to me. Learning to trust that the world will be okay, that there will be enough for me. [I am] trying to live what I believe. It comes out of years of trying to live an authentic life, figuring out what I value, what I hold dear, and trying to live that...I hope there are a lot of paths available. At my worst, my anxiety gets very high. No one will hire you. You will have to work at McDonalds, although there is nothing wrong with honest labor. I will become this mindless person. [I] will be boring. [I] will be living my life through my children. I fear how I will make this all work, knowing that I am a control freak. I like to plan...I worry. What is the professional impact of my taking 5-6 years out from the work force? [It is] really scary to not have my hands on my wheel. How do you define yourself? How do you keep yourself from just being a mom and how do you deal with other people's views of who you are? No one will speak to me at cocktail parties when they find out I am a mom. People assume that you are not interesting, that you do not need intellectual stimulation.

Right now, Tracey is trying to lead an authentic life, one that does not compromise her sense of herself, trying to instill a sense of accountability in her children.

Her self-esteem appears to be variable in an environmental context that does not appreciate the choices that she has made, most recently to take time out and stay at home and raise her soon-to-be two children:

I am coming out of years of trying to live an authentic life, figuring out what I value, what I hold dear and trying to live that. How do I help my son grow up to be who he is, help him explore his gifts, his passions, his interests? How do I help him develop competence and self esteem as opposed to an inflated self esteem? There is an 'I am an okay lovable person, and I am enough,' as opposed to a self esteem that is not grounded in reality. How do I help him connect with himself and other people? How do I help him have authentic connections, to help him know who he is and what he is offering?

Understanding Tracey's struggles requires an understanding of the importance of cultural context and the complex interplay of racism and sexism (Williams 2005). The questions she rhetorically asks regarding her son seem to apply not only to her struggles, as they are embedded in a larger cultural context. Tracey continues her search for an identity that includes a nonmarginalized view of herself as an authentic Black professional woman, wife, and mother who is "seen," occupying a place in the world that is recognized, her quest acknowledged.

Sergio

The immigration process, leaving one country to resettle in another country, presents interesting challenges for the emerging and young adult. The individual is in transition, adapting to the "new" cultural values and experiences, while simultaneously holding on to the "old." The immigrant not only experiences the instability and uncertainty associated with his/her immigrant status, but is also likely to experience flux associated with this developmental period (Walsh et al. 2005). Sergio, a 26-year-old immigrant from Bulgaria, exemplifies the intersection of these two processes.

Sergio arrived from Bulgaria as an adolescent, attended college in the United States, and is studying for a graduate degree in business administration. He alludes to a self that was shaped in part by a communist regime. Immigrating to this country has afforded Sergio an opportunity to revisit and revise his worldviews. He provides a poignant metaphor that speaks to this process:

The image I get is that of a bird a canary that has been in captivity, that someone has caught it and kept it in a cage. And now the canary has gotten freedom, and it is now experiencing life as it should have been. I would say the door has always been open, but the bird has always been scared. My own personal self-imposed cage.

Sergio draws a picture of "captivity." Over this, he interposes an additional layer of complexity, suggesting that, in a bid for autonomy, he places "self-imposed" limits on his freedom in addition to the limits of freedom imposed by a communist regime.

Sergio describes his social context in Bulgaria. He alludes to different norms regarding dating expectations within an atmosphere of secrecy. In addition, he speaks of himself as a shy, awkward adolescent:

[I]would have liked to have had some sort of a love interest in high school. And then of course, I would have liked that I was more sociable. I would hang out with people and go to the parties we had. I would have liked to be less shy. I went to high school in my country...It was during the time a communist regime was still around. You could not have a love interest; you could not be public with it. It was not something that was expected. People would have other people that they would like, but nobody would know about it. You would not tell your parents, because the expectation was, [that] you would reach a certain age and then you would get married. High school age was not considered the age to be seeing other people. We were closed to the rest of the world. You would not see movies, [as] boyfriend girl friend [out in the open]. Don't ask don't tell. It helped communism by subduing people, not allowing them to do what they liked.

Sergio has appropriated many of the more freewheeling developmental markers that prevail in his adopted country. He hopes to have a career in place by his early 30s. He also hopes to experience "three to four long-term relationships," and to be married by the age of 35. He states that had he not immigrated to the United States, he would be committed to a career in Bulgaria, and most probably be married. Sergio has not had a long-term relationship, in part due to his shyness, in part due to the freedom he perceives with respect to what he deems as culturally and developmentally appropriate. He recently met a woman on the Internet, a relationship he hopes will continue to develop and thrive.

Sergio is availing himself of choices and opportunities in terms of his career. He has had several jobs, none of which have been an adequate fit. Sergio gets bored easily, and does not appreciate repetitive, serial tasks. He states, "after working someplace for some time, I get bored. Trying different things is what I really, really like, and seeing what I like." In describing himself vis-a-vis work, he depicts an image of himself as a bee:

A bee going from flower to flower and having the nectar from different flowers. I am taking a sample of different flowers, in a sampling mode, trying different things, and that is why I have that image of a bee. I think it has been a really good thing for me. The nectar would be the skills - software skills, people skills where you interact with different kinds of people.

He recognizes that there are consequences to experimentation:

You don't get the feeling of being settled till much much later in life. Always feeling you could do something better. There is always more out there to try. That is a feeling of being uneasy, not being happy with your life, one of the consequences. There is more different types of jobs that are available. A lot more opportunity, a lot more choice. And since there is so much choice, people feel they can move if they don't like particular positions.

Sergio speaks of premature foreclosure, closing off consideration of options:

When I started college, I made the mistake of deciding what I want to do and focusing on that only. When I finished school, the whole dot com just fell and I could not find a job, and so I had to try different things. Had I been more careful, had a broader view of things, I could have taken different kinds of classes and I think that would have helped me.

Given that Sergio experienced a Communist regime as a child and adolescent, choice and experimentation are particularly salient for him:

It comes down to choice. If there was not so much choice, people would go with what they have. I would equal it with someone entering a store, buy whatever, being swamped with everything they can buy. If they had three or four choices they would just get done with it. Because they are looking at all these different things they are spending time looking at all these choices, rather than going in and getting out.

On a personal level, people get the feeling I have tried all these different things in the end I chose what is closest to my own personality. On a broader level, [it is] probably affecting our society, with people not deciding early enough on relationships or work. [I am getting philosophical]. If they will not marry till late 30s early 40s, they will have fewer kids, will make our society older. [There is] a bit of a down side, they're not getting married till their 30s, not having more than one kid or no kids, won't be as many kids around. The society begins to lose its edge. Kids bring in the new things. A lot of innovation is done for the young people or by people. They see the future. Innovation suffers. Society begins to get older. Loses its edge. The hope is by people trying different things, deciding what they really like, it will make us a lot happier in our life, more adjusted in our society.

In summary, choice and freedom are paramount issues for Sergio, a function in part of his experience of “growing up” in an eastern European country. Sergio provides an intricate narrative, but one that is incomplete. He is continuing to revisit and revise his sense of self, informed by diverse sociocultural political experiences.

Lily, Revisited

Given the multiplicity of paths forward, and the lack of a reliable map that would inform the choice of one route over another, it is not surprising that many emerging and young adults pause at the first step. This is where we left Lily, an emerging adult we met in Chap. 1, whose career development narrative has emphasized a recurrent theme in most of the case studies, the future as a trackless land. But Lily's nascent identity must be formed in a different vacuum, the vacuum in which gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) identities can recognize one another but remain limited in number, marginal in the larger cultural context. “In total, the power and pervasiveness of heteronormativity in predominant social institutions, discourse, and facets of public life presents an image of proper adult citizenship that discourages deviation from its standards” (Torkelson 2012, p. 136).

This is not to say that the visibility and legal status of gay and lesbian people in the United States, Australia, and Western Europe has not undergone rapid transformation in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The legal challenge to overturn bans on same sex marriage has been successful in many parts of the United States. But just as the election of a mixed race U.S. Chief Executive in 2008 did not resolve all the sequelae of centuries of racial discrimination, the apparent, ongoing success of a legal struggle directly involving only a portion of

the GLBT community has not in itself transformed the cultural context in which developmental paths are chosen. Despite the growing visibility of lesbian and gay married couples and families in communities all over America and Western Europe, heteronormativity remains the dominant discourse of Western societies (Torkelson 2012).

Emerging and young adults who identify as a sexual minority confront the same transitional barriers as their heterosexual counterparts, but they do so in a cultural context that does not mirror their sense of selves, nor offer a range of possible futures and selves. Traditional themes of domesticity and coupling pervade popular media (Torkelson 2012). Schools support adherence to heterosexual gender role standards, including mode of dress; although schools teach sexual education, they do not tend to focus on nonheterosexual pairings.

Seeking adventure as an antidote to foreclosure and premature stagnation, Lily is going head to head with her parents about her decision to spend a year in Australia. On its face, this adventure postpones not only career decisions, but diverts the energy required for another task, the task of disclosure: she has yet to come out to either parent about her sexuality. Neither of Lily's parents met—in any context—the woman with whom Lily is presently in a relationship.

Emerging adulthood is usually the first time that individuals disclose their sexual identity, both to themselves and to others (Needham and Austin 2010). Though this task is partially completed, Lily is fully aware that her sexuality will be a constant struggle for her, her secret an insurmountable barrier in terms of her relationship with her parents that will take years to address. To her, coming out unfolds over a lifetime, mirroring Orne's conclusion that "The concept of strategic outness defies notions of an end point to the coming out process" (Orne 2011, p. 688). Lily, to date, is "out" when and where she has chosen, and may yet inform her parents of her lesbian identity from a safer vantage point.

Researchers such as Croteau et al. (2008) are proposing minority sexual identity models that acknowledge the nonlinearity of the developmental experience, and are inclusive of a variety of minority sexual identities. The Dual Trajectory Lesbian and Gay identity model proposes four phases flexible enough to accommodate progressions in identity development such as Lily's, inclusive of "circular progressions, re-cycling, and location in multiple phases simultaneously" along each of these trajectories. First among them are:

- a. awareness of difference,
- b. exploration of affection and desire, and the awareness of LBGTQ categories,
- c. a deepening of commitment, which entails identification with the group and the notion of making same-sex choices going forward,
- d. and the process of synthesis or internalization, which involves inclusion of one's sexual minority identity into social contexts. (p. 197)

As cited in Croteau et al. (2008), this is an inclusive model that has the capacity to account for a variety of possible contexts in which an individual integrates his or her sense of self. According to this multiphasic and nonconsecutive model, Lily

stands on the verge of the internalization and synthesis phase. Elements of earlier phases combine with this as a marker of where Lily currently finds herself.

Lily, recalling the past, is not surprised that this work is still undone, believing that if her parents were more emotionally supportive, she would have had a much better life. She recalls a period of social anxiety and full-blown panic attacks when she did not feel that her parents were “there for her,” remembering her father’s, “Just get over it.” Instead of attempting to work things through, they simply wrote checks for her therapy and, in Lily’s retelling, ignored the issue. Then again, the choice to remain at home and retain that security may have exacted a cost, contributing to the general feeling of impasse as well. In this light, Lily’s gambit to leave the country can be seen not so much as an evasion, or even a postponement, but the end of a search for a very large transitional psychological space to position herself for her next move.

In the meantime, Lily has found other ways to get her needs met, happily reporting close relationships with her sister and a best friend. She describes them both as “family.” She came out to both of them just recently, and their positive reactions exceeded her expectations. She still wishes she had come to terms with her sexuality a lot sooner; she could have lived her life as she wanted in her early 20s, she reports. When asked to choose a metaphor to describe her life, Lily says, “life is a puzzle.” The pieces of the puzzle are coming together—not the haphazard scramble it was before—yet it is still far from being complete. “I am working on becoming more honest about who I am, and who I want to become,” she says.

Researchers developing the literature on GLBTQ identity formation would not be surprised that Lily reframes her developmental task as a solitary, intrapsychic struggle within the family context, without much reference to the greater world. Nealy (2008) explains that “from early on LGBT persons are surrounded by immense loss—growing up without visible role models and without connections to queer history and queer culture, growing up not even knowing that they have a history and a culture” (p. 290). All that is at stake here, evidently, is her “honesty”; the entire struggle to establish her own identity is one she has conceived of as a test of her own personal integrity. In this context, it is no wonder that Lily feels that she requires an entirely new and vast continent in which to prepare for the task.

Lily may choose to commit and even marry her present lover, or marry another woman, congruent with the more compliant norms receiving the most attention in the present cultural landscape. Alternatively, she may choose a less conventional course of serial commitment, identification with a family or community, or combine elements of each of these possibilities. She may come out to her parents or proceed as she has, measuring what its worth to her against the feeling that the ship has already sailed, the opportunity for a meaningful exchange on the subject already passed. Either way, in a time of growing acceptance and acknowledgment of a normative subset of LGBT individuals, it is more crucial than ever to explore the diversity of sexual minority identity, mindful that there are multiple pathways to its formation (Croteau et al. 2008; Torkelson 2012).

Conclusions

The lives of Emily, Ryan, Tracey, Sergio, and Lily exemplify the diversity of experiences related to identity formation, and the range of paths taken professionally and personally. Whereas Ryan is following a path consistent with Guardians and Pathmakers, as identified by Marcia (1966), Tracey appears to be least differentiated with respect to her career path, but more directed and differentiated in her personal life. Emily and Sergio know what they are interested in, and are in the process of connecting those interests with a career path, one more traditional, the other less so. Both remain unattached, although Sergio identifies a path he would like to follow in terms of his emotional and social life, while Emily wonders how she might forge a new one.

In sum, identity development is an ongoing process, multifaceted and informed by environmental expectations and contingencies. It is a process that involves “chang[ing]” and “stay[ing] the same” (Josselson 1996, p. 256). Thus, identity is:

The backbone of a life story provides unity to a life as lived by choosing versions of one’s history that ‘fit’ often editing out what is incongruent. The past is reconfigured to make our present identity seem inevitable—or if not inevitable, at least meaningful. ... In retelling our lives, the past also absorbs aspects of the larger culture’s narratives (so that we all feel like products of our times). (p. 256)

...Some [individuals] live a single story; others live many... these stories intermingle and influence one another.” ...[The] plot ... is seldom linear. ...Identity encompasses all these selves, forming a narrative that weaves them together. (p. 257)

Interviews with emerging and young adult participants illustrated the diversity of experiences related to identity formation, and the range of paths taken professionally and personally. The following chapter focuses on culture and class and how it informs the narratives of these emerging and young adults.

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