

Identity Formation, Youth, and Development: A Simplified Approach

Student Guide

2016 version

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James Côté

Introduction

This Student Guide goes with the textbook *Identity Formation, Youth, and Development: A Simplified Approach*

Authors: James E. Côté & Charles G. Levine

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This guide provides the material for those taking a course based on this book. It provides chapter-by-chapter short-answer questions and exercises that students can use as they are reading the book and studying for exams. The questions and exercises are designed to help students better understand the material at hand as well as to think critically about the implications of the material.

The appendices of this guide provide the links to the online flashcards and multiple-choice quizzes for material in the book.

Chapter topic/themes	Short-answer questions based on the text
1. <i>From Ageless Questions to Current Theories</i> : The philosophical and theoretical roots of the “identity question”	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the “identity question” and why is it important? 2. Why were humans likely not concerned with the “identity question” throughout most of human history? 3. How does optimal distinctiveness theory relate to the principles of integration and differentiation?
2. <i>Culture and History</i> : Variations in identity formation in different historical and cultural contexts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are “new normal” difficulties of identity formation? 2. How might problems in identity formation be passed on intergenerationally? 3. What socio-cultural developments distinguish late-modern and early-modern societies?
3. <i>A Social Psychology of Identities and Their Formation</i> : A developmental social-psychological framework for studying the multifaceted nature of contemporary identity formation in late-modern societies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Briefly describe the strategic tasks at the three levels of identity in late-modern contexts. 2. Evaluate arguments for and against the existence of both the “real self” and the “role self.” 3. Consider the pros and cons of the following assertion: The average person is not capable of undertaking optimal identity formation in late-modern societies.
4. <i>Moral Reasoning</i> : Interrelated forms of human development, focusing on empathy, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, and ethical identity formation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What qualities do identity development, self development, and moral development optimally share in late-modern contexts? 2. What are the implications of the empirical research finding that only a very small minority of people operates at the post-conventional level, even in adulthood? 3. What are some implications of the transformation of the seven deadly sins in consumer–corporate capitalist societies, especially for the development of ethical identities?
5. <i>Proactivity</i> : How forms of development are related to identity-based agency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do the sociological and psychological approaches compare with respect to the issue of structure and agency? 2. How does the Simplified Theory of Identity Formation (SIFT) address the issue of structure vs. agency? 3. Can both the feminist and cross-cultural critiques of the concept of agency be valid? If so, what are some implications?
6. <i>Identity Capital</i> : A model of proactive and ethical identity formation in late-modern contexts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the three theoretical influences on the Identity Capital Model? 2. What is the Matthew effect and how is it related to identity capital acquisition? 3. What is the identity capital portfolio and how does it relate to late-modern job market?
7. <i>Current Scientific Approaches</i> : The scientific evidence concerning identity formation in general	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the three characteristics of the identity crisis and how are they related to resolutions of the crisis? 2. List the five identity formation strategies the scientific literature has identified in late-modern societal contexts and indicate which is the most effective and why.

	3. What does the research suggest about the best way to drastically reduce suicide among Aboriginal young people?
8. <i>Contexts of Identity Formation</i> : How identity formation is throttled (accelerated or obstructed) in various societal contexts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why are intersecting social identities so difficult to study? 2. What appears to be the best model to emulate in order to produce positive identity formation among marginalized groups? 3. Why do schools not play a stronger role in fostering optimal identity formation?
9. <i>Identity Formation and the Potentials of Human Development</i> : Promising interventions that can be undertaken to foster optimal development, along with promising methodologies and theories that should help this important area of study to continue to grow	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the “tyranny of choice” and how does it relate to the identity capital model applied to higher education? 2. Why is Meg Jay so adamant in insisting that it is a mistake for young people to think that 30 is the new 20? 3. What does “identity economics” add to traditional economic assumptions?

Chapter	Exercises extrapolating from the text, with video links
1. <i>From Ageless Questions to Current Theories</i>	<p>Tip for understanding “metacognition”: Doing well in this type of course, in which there are a number of abstract concepts, requires advanced cognitive abilities, such as the abstract reasoning (see Chapter 4). Metacognition about self and identity involves the ability to “abstract” one’s self—to see oneself as an “object.” This includes seeing yourself as others see you or as a sort of “fly on the wall” observing you as you go about your daily routines (e.g., the classic movie <i>A Christmas Carol</i> is about how the character Scrooge is taken around by “ghosts” to show him how to gain perspective on his self-induced miseries: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvdMjXhPGd0).</p> <p>A way to practice metacognition is to monitor your reactions to the material in this course—are you defensive about some things but go “aha” about other things? Another way is to compare yourself before and after the course—for example, how you feel about your past, present, and future self? The ways you change are referred to as transformative learning.</p> <p>See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metacognition.</p>
2. <i>Culture and History</i>	<p>Take some time to reflect upon how “who you are” has been affected by the specific, chance-based circumstance of when and where you were born. How would your life have been different had you been born 100, 200, 500, or 1,000 years ago? (Read a book or watch a series like <i>Pillars of the Earth</i>, available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6M24c9XtbdA, to get an idea regarding how people lived 1,000 years ago.) To really test your imagination, try to think about how your life would be different if you were born 100, 200, 500, or 1,000 years in the future. Watch a <i>Star Trek</i> episode or movie to see how others have imagined this (e.g., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnhcrZ_RFqo).</p> <p>Next, focus on your life as it is now. Try to think of the ten most important things that have made you “who you are” as a person in this point in time. After gaining a sense of this, think of where/who you will be in 5, 10, and 20 years from now. Will it make any difference to your future if you take the time to plan ahead and set goals, with a definite determination to reach those goals, or are you the type of person who is happy to just let things happen to you?</p>
3. <i>A Social Psychology of Identities and Their Formation</i>	<p>When people become aware of the potential distinction between their “role self” and “real self,” as when they take this course, they can become very reflective about their lives. In the hubbub of daily life, it can be quite difficult to sort out these two possibilities in your own life. Here are a couple of thought experiments about how you might distinguish a “role self” and “real self”:</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Imagine that you are stranded on deserted island for a long period of time, as in the classic novel <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> (http://www.veoh.com/watch/v20917239fKpwPhHt), or the more recent Tom Hanks movie <i>Castaway</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJvosb4UCLs). 2. Imagine you have removed yourself from all familiar surroundings for a period of at least a month. Ideally, you would be alone without any gadgets that would link you with the “virtual” or “real” worlds, say on a mountain-top (preferably with no physical dangers or discomforts). <p>In either case, do you think that an “authentic” or “real” sense of self persists, or does the sense of self dissolve in that sort of situation where there are no roles to play? How would you know? Would one way be to sense your gut feelings and intuitions about what you want in your day-to-day life and in the long term, as opposed to pleasing others? Or is the answer something in between depending on your ego/self strengths? How might this period of self-examination and reflection benefit you when you returned to your current life?</p> <p>Note that in both of the fictional examples, the protagonist tried to create a world that included “others”—something/one familiar that provided a sort of mirror for the self. Tom Hanks developed a touching relationship with the volleyball, Wilson. How would you fare under these circumstances—is there anything you do in your current life that would prepare you, such as spending quality time alone developing an “interior life”?</p>
4. <i>Moral Reasoning</i>	<p>Is there something about wealth that makes people less empathetic – less moral? Listen to this radio interview and see what the research suggests: http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/episode/2013/10/16/are-the-rich-less-feeling-research-suggests-wealth-reduces-compassion/</p> <p>Do you see this research reflected in your own life, in terms of your own sense of entitlement or what you see in others? What does this research suggest about the ethical-identity formation of the people who are given, or take, leadership positions? What does it suggest about future improvements to society—are they likely to be as hampered as ever? The final chapter of this book returns to this issue with reflections about what societal élites need to experience in terms of moral–ethical development to become true leaders of humankind.</p>
5. <i>Proactivity</i>	<p>For a thought experiment about how you exercise your own personal agency, especially in terms of the moral-ethical implications of your actions, consider the following imaginary situation:</p> <p>You have suddenly been “transported” (in the <i>Star Trek</i> sense) out of your daily life and put in front of a panel of ancestors (e.g., grandparents and great grandparents), who likely experienced a life with many more hardships and challenges than your own. How would you account for your:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Past and current self/identities: have you done your best to maximize your potential and utilize the privileges your generation has been given (e.g., free education, expensive health care and emergency services, all the food you can eat and more, etc.)? 2. Do your <i>actual</i> behaviors always reflect your <i>professed</i> values? 3. Are your future goals clearly formulated, and done so in ways that are fully respectful of, and helpful to, others? 4. What will your life amount to given your current efforts? <p>For a “pep talk” on this topic, see: http://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve</p>
6. <i>Identity Capital</i>	<p>Watch Meg Jay’s TED Talk, “The Defining Decade” (http://mashable.com/2013/07/08/ted-talks-change-your-life/). If you are part of this age group (30 and younger), what are your immediate reactions? Does Jay inspire or insult you, or are her recommendations out of your reach given your socio-economic circumstances?</p>

	<p>This talk is listed at the linked-to website as one of “15 TED talks that will change your life.” If you reacted negatively to the talk, does that say more about you than what she had to say?</p> <p>Her work is based in part on the Identity Capital Model. After reading this chapter, do you have a different opinion of the relevance of the talk? Either way, take the time to seriously consider what you want your life to be like at 30, 40, and 50, and give an honest appraisal concerning whether what you are doing at the present time is going to help make these aspirations come true.</p>
7. <i>Current Scientific Approaches</i>	<p>Both classical and contemporary literature, theater, and cinema are replete with stories of people’s journeys into and through adulthood. More recent ones are called “coming of age” stories, whereas older ones did not draw such sharp distinctions youth and adulthood for most of the population (because the youth period was either very short for them or essentially nonexistent). One particularly influential story from the 20th century is <i>The Razor’s Edge</i>, written by W. Somerset Maugham in the 1940s; it is a book with implications concerning the “examined life.” This novel focuses on a portrayal of a classic Searcher. In fact, the book is still used as recommended reading in meditation centers around the world, including ashrams and Buddhist monasteries. It was made into movies in 1946 and 1983. Watch one of these versions to understand what might motivate the Searcher (the character Larry), but also try to identify the identity strategies of the other characters, like Elliot, a Guardian, or Sophie, a Refuser. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Km4vWJIpygm)</p>
8. <i>Contexts of Identity Formation</i>	<p>How important is your “student identity” and how do you react to threats to it? Assuming you are a college/university student, you likely did well in high school; perhaps you were an “A” student. This positive identity has no doubt enhanced your self-esteem, but how much do you truly “own” that identity in the sense of being fully responsible for it? How often are you personally offended when you receive a lower grade? Do you believe it is the fault of your teacher/professor, who is perhaps being unreasonable or incompetent? If these are familiar experiences, or you have witnessed them in others, you should take heed of the research that shows that grades have become very inflated in many school systems over the past several decades, especially in high schools. Grade inflation has occurred in colleges/universities too, but not usually as extensively, so when many students move from the secondary to tertiary levels of education they often experience a “grade drop,” sometimes by two letter levels (As to Cs). The C was once considered a respectable grade and many higher-learning institutions have tried to preserve this benchmark, to differentiate typical or average performances (Cs) from very good (Bs) and outstanding (As) ones. By definition, most people are average and very few are outstanding, but inflated grades do not reflect this.</p> <p>With these insights in mind, does your self-perception change? Does it help you understand variations in your earned grades better? Does it make you less defensive or resentful of your teachers? Isn’t a realistic view of your abilities a better preparation for the “real world,” than an unrealistic one where “everyone is above average” (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Wobegon for clarification of this allusion)?</p> <p>For the empirical evidence of grade inflation, see http://www.gradeinflation.com and http://stuartr.com/grade-inflation/.</p> <p>For a spoof video on this topic, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ow1ALkrjxU8.</p> <p>For a more serious consideration of the topic, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQa-gJ0bEdI.</p>
9. <i>Identity Formation and the Potentials of Human</i>	<p>As a thought exercise, think back to two types of situations in your life where you found yourself managing identity-relevant information in situations that were highly <i>salient</i> in reference to your social status and that required identity management.</p> <p>For example, what is the most laudatory thing that has happened to you, and how did you manage</p>

<i>Development</i>	<p>your interactions with others to play it down—to distance yourself or “normalize” it? This could have been receiving a great honor in school, like being elected class president or chosen to be valedictorian. Some people who are very popular, attractive, or talented must engage in this type of identity management all of the time.</p> <p>Conversely, what is the most shameful thing that has happened to you, and how did you manage your interactions with others to play it down—also to “normalize” or distance yourself from the stigma? This could involve being caught in some wrongdoing, like being involved in some peer activity that got out of hand, and you were the only one who got caught. People who have been accused of serious offences and have been publically shamed must manage their <i>stigmatized identities</i> on a regular basis. (For more about this type of experience, see Posner, J. (1976). The stigma of excellence: On being just right. <i>Sociological Inquiry</i>, 46, 141–44.)</p> <p>As noted in box 2.2 of the textbook, Erving Goffman pointed out that there are various sorts of stigma, including physical and mental disabilities that many people must regularly manage. Modifying the language used in reference to the stigma is one way to try to normalize it, as in referring to being disabled as being “otherly enabled.” In Chapter 8, the way in which the Deaf community has collectively approached the stigmatization of Deaf identities is described, along with their efforts to create positive types of identity formation for Deaf youth.</p> <p>How does your present life reflect how you managed those experiences? In the case of a stigmatized identity, did you seek counseling, or should you have done so? Many people go through life carrying the after-effects of these experiences, with persistent symptoms of anxiety and/or depression, thinking these symptoms are “normal” for them. If you were blessed with the opposite experience and carried the benefits of “excellence” throughout your life, how much do you take these benefits for granted, perhaps taking more credit than you deserve? And, if so, how much do you “blame” the less fortunate, perhaps because you don’t fully understand how much those people were/are the victims of circumstances?</p>
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Appendices

Flash Cards

– Excel folder <*>

Practice Quizzes

– Excel folder <*>