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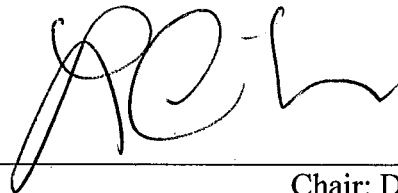
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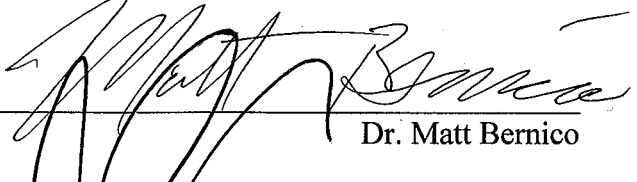
Kaleidoscope: Identity in Motion

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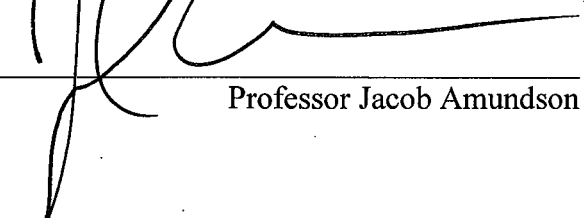


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Kaleidoscope: Identity in Motion

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Introduction:

This paper is a work of autoethnography. In other words, the author uses self-reflection in his writing to help explore his own personal experience and directly tie it into a larger social or cultural context. In this paper, the idea of identity as a social and spiritual construction is explored. The goal of this paper is to describe and explain identity through the lenses of adolescents in higher education. This will be explored through the frameworks of developmental psychology and spiritual formation. Data was gathered in the form of a recorded conversation that revolved around questions of personal identity. For this research project, I used purposive sampling. The discussion group is comprised of four (three male and one female) Caucasian students at a rural, midwestern, Christian institution. These individuals form a group of friends that is representative of a typical circle in the Greenville University community. These individuals share some commonality as current or former cross country and track athletes. Each individual is different in relation to their own life experiences, particularly their socioeconomic status, life-altering circumstances (i.e. being adopted or raped), and gender. This format will allow participants to interact and engage with one another in dialogue. Piaget's theory of cognitive development and Fowler's stages of faith will be explored and considered in the paper. Discussion questions presented in the conversation will be framed and explored in the context of the participant's own lenses of personal experience. The goal of this discussion is to describe and explain social and spiritual identity development and the relationship between them. This discussion will provide a better understanding of how individuals interactions with others and the world around them impact personal identity formation.

Review of Literature:

This chapter will serve as an introduction to the literature as it pertains to the formation of socially imposed and spiritually formed identity in emerging adults. Social identity development will be explored in adolescence through early adulthood, with our attention directed towards the ideas and works of Piaget (1977) and Erikson (1999). Piaget (1977) describes and explains a theory of cognitive and social development beginning in adolescence, paying close attention to the struggles and concerns of young adults. For our research purposes, the adolescent period refers to the typical college age range from 18 –24 years old. This chapter also addresses Kohlberg’s Moral Stages in terms of studying identity and its limitations. Fowler’s (1981) *Stages of Faith* will be explored, along with his ideas of faith development and identity as influenced by Tillich (1956) and Niebuhr (1963). The connection between social and spiritual formation is described and explained while placing emphasis on the system of stages as hierarchical.

Social Identity and Spiritual Identity (Faith) Development:

Piaget, (1977) and Fowler, (1981) assert that social and spiritual identity development is comprised of a hierarchical set of stages, that are established to measure cognitive, emotional, social and moral maturity. Piaget observes that personality construction, in regard to reflective personal engagement, will only emerge with the development of formal operational thought. Piaget’s research suggests that identity development occurs in defined stages. This tends to begin in adolescence in the fourth stage known as the formal operational stage. Piaget has a total of four stages of cognitive development. In order of development, they are the sensorimotor, preoperational,

concrete operational, and the formal operational stages. In the sensorimotor stage, an important learned skill is the acquisition of object permanence. This simply means that an object will continue to exist in their minds even when it is out of sight. Stage two, the preoperational stage, is highlighted by egocentrism and their ability to play pretend (Ginsburg, p. 65). The concrete operational stage is a time where children will learn conservation. Conservation simply refers to one's ability to determine that a certain quantity is unchanged despite a change in the container or other physical appearance. In the formal operational stage, children are able to weigh and reason potential outcomes and consequences (Ginsburg, p. 110). This fourth and final stage is typically where adolescents demonstrate moral thought processes and ultimately think more like adults (Ginsburg, p. 206).

The development of formal operational thinking and allows for a breakthrough in thought. This sort of thinking can be described as "utopian." The ability to wield intellectually transcendent thinking allows for new ways of thinking and engaging in self-reflection and the adoption of other lenses. Adolescents who have reached the Formal Operational stage are aware of the infinite number of perspectives for a given problem and have improved in adopting lenses outside of their own for understanding. A point of struggle with adolescents is the over-assimilation or adoption of others' perspectives into their own. In comparison to children in the concrete operational stage, adolescents are able to see their life paths from the outside. They can construct a personal past and project potential transformations and a future based off of where they have been and where they are now (Fowler, p. 71).

Fowler discusses the act of perspective taking. The two types addressed are interpersonal and mutual perspective taking. Interpersonal perspective taking is explained as, "I see you seeing me, [and] I construct the me I think you see" (Fowler, p. 73). Whereas Mutual perspective taking is explained as "I see you seeing me, I see you seeing me seeing you" (Fowler, p. 73). Being able to coordinate the objective reflection of self and others comes together to create something we can call "third-person perspective" (Fowler, p. 73). Adopting this "third-person perspective" opens many doors of thought and is sometimes collaborative or cooperative in nature. This process is a weighing out of two respective parties' interpretations to come to a determination - and it plays a large part in considering and making situational judgments. When this action becomes habitual, it suggests that there has been marked growth and development in prudence and moral judgment (Fowler, p. 73-74).

In this stage of thought, the adolescent is able to hypothesize, derive conclusions and interpret the end result. Piaget (1988) suggests that scientific reasoning is a basic difference between individuals in the concrete operational and formal operational stages. This mental power and flexibility are indicative of a mind that has achieved a high level of equilibrium. However, Piaget also asserts that this is not always the case, as environmental factors or a selective interest of the adolescent can play a large factor in their success (Piaget 1988). This could be anywhere from a lack of education and stimulation, or this could be an issue where adolescents utilize formal operations in areas pertinent to their agendas or interests.

Like spiritual development, general cognitive and physical development have contributing factors that allow forward progress to be made. Among these are maturation,

experience, social transmission, and equilibration. Physical maturation impacts individuals in two ways; they can exert direct and indirect effects on individuals. Body parts, like eyes, don't directly provide a child with an already constructed collection of knowledge. Rather, they provide a means in which the child can take in knowledge for themselves. Other systems like the CNS (Central Nervous System), take time to develop and allow for complete cognitive functioning. Immature systems directly impact the capacity with which an individual can operate. This, along with generally healthy physical systems are directly related to intellectual growth (Piaget p. 213).

Social transmission is a bit different as it broadly refers to how culture impacts and influences a child's thought. This transmission could come from reading a book, teachers, parental instruction, or imitating a role model. This is another way that cognitive development is encouraged. Children rely on the wisdom of previous generations, and this information and experience are passed and onto the child as a learning tool. These are all valuable tools and means to participate in higher functioning and intellectual tasks. Piaget contends that this, like many other factors, cannot stand alone. In order for this method of transmission to be effective, the child must be ready to understand the knowledge and information being handed to them. There needs to be a base, or a foundation laid that has primed and prepared them to understand the cultural wisdom. Just like you can't build a building from the top down, you can't start at the top of an intellectual tower. You have to lay the cornerstones and build your way up. This explains Piaget's hierarchical theory of development.

Equilibration is the final factor that will be addressed; and it in a sense, combines the other three that cannot individually explain mental development. Equilibration

broadly used, refers to the self-regulatory processes of the child in question. Through this, the child continually progresses through higher levels of equilibrium in development.

This process of Equilibration is crucial to the development and serves as the “backbone” of mental growth (Piaget, p. 221). Equilibrium, as Piaget defines it, is “a system of exchanges between an open system and its surroundings. (Piaget, p.236).” In other words, it is a system in active balance with its environment. Having said all of this, Piaget asserts that “the degree of equilibrium is defined by a system’s position on three dimensions: field of application, stability, and openness” (Piaget p. 236). The higher the degree of these dimensions or qualities, the greater the equilibrium. In making this assertion, Piaget is saying something bigger. All of this points to the idea that the child is not just passive or reactionary to all of these external events and forces. On the contrary, the child is an active player in his or her development process (Piaget, p. 236).

Identity development seems to be a cooperative venture in which multiple parties are actively involved. Once an adolescent reaches young adulthood, individuals begin to identify with people differently. Erikson asserted that “one's identity is found in important ways by one's identifications with family, groups and social institutional order that protects them” (Fowler, p. 78). This stage is one of conformity and loyalty, with an active focus on building up and defending the established orders, views, and people with shared values. From there, the following stages focuses on society and laws; with decisions and views being balanced by the interests of the social system and established requirements. The last stage pays great attention to morality and making decisions with the interest of the greatest number in mind (Fowler, 78-80, 83).

In regard to spiritual development, it is crucial to realize that the stages of faith only make up a part of the “story.” Piaget and Kohlberg help provide us with an epistemological focus. Epistemology is simply the study of “how” we know (Fowler, p. 90, 98). Niebuhr and Tillich would assert that faith is “a way of seeing the world.” Furthermore, they consider it a kind of knowing - and this “knowing” is a crucial part of constructing oneself.

Fowler asserts that the stages of faith deal with a different kind of knowing than the cognitive and moral stages of Piaget and Kohlberg. Faith stages come from the integration of knowing and valuing - two things that both Piaget and Kohlberg’s theories avoid (Fowler, p. 99). Despite their major differences, it is important to discuss how these areas intersect with a holistic approach. Fowler suggests that there are relationships between “reasoning & imagination, moral judgment, and symbolic representation, and ecstatic intuition and logical deduction.” Fowler asserts that researchers have not found an adequate way to model these relationships. Fowler still believes that it is important to show the connections between Piaget and Kohlberg’s stages within these faith stages.

Fowler also asserts that they meet the structural-developmental criteria to be considered stages. They provide generalizable, formal descriptions of integrated sets of operations of knowing and valuing. Like Piaget’s stages of cognitive development, stages of faith are also considered to be similarly sequential and hierarchical in nature (Fowler, p. 100).

The structural-developmental interactional approach calls us to view development as resulting from the interaction between an innovative subject and a dynamic, changing environment (Fowler, p. 100). Behaviorists like B.F. Skinner, believe that people are

malleable or shapeable and that the existence of dynamic environments impacts an individual's development. They are considered "tabula rasa," or blank slates that are guided by conditioning and reinforcement (Bonior, p. 45). Maturationists like Arnold Gessell, however, claim that development is a "pre-programmed process" that ignores the environment and they de-emphasize most environmental factors. To them, development is an established, sequential process. Instead of choosing an extreme, the structural developmental approach suggests a combination of the two. They believe that there is a genetic range of possibilities, but that individuals still creatively interact within that range in a dynamic and changing environment. Piaget and Kohlberg would assert that structural development occurs when an individual interacts with and adapts to the changing demands of a dynamic environment. Development occurs when equilibrium is disturbed and forces the individual to try and restore the balance between themselves and their environment. Faith development, similarly, is born out of crises and other life challenges that cause a person to reflect an attempt to restore balance to their life. Theologians call this revelation - and this calls for a perspective or lens shift in our faith. We have to reform our faith vision and apply this revelation to restore said balance.

In offering these "philosophical psychologies," Piaget and Kohlberg suggest that later stages of development provide a more complete and adequate way of "knowing" than earlier ones (Fowler, p. 101). Making the same claim, in the realm of faith and spirituality must be made carefully. It is important to defend and establish that claim.

There are limitations in the application when faith is addressed through the structural developmental perspective. Both Piaget and Kohlberg separated cognition from emotion. Emotion is not seen as trite or unimportant, but in terms of rational maturity,

emotion and affection are seen as lacking objectivity (Fowler, p. 101). As a result, there are two kinds of reasoning to be explored. Fowler calls these types of reasoning “the logic of rational certainty” and “the logic of conviction” (Fowler, p. 102). The logic of rational certainty has to do with the objective and the impersonal. This type of reasoning deals with facts and “replicable truths.” The logic of conviction, he coins as a “more comprehensive way of knowing.” This kind of knowing extends to both the modification and revising of what is known and the “knower” themselves (Fowler, p. 103). Another limitation of Piaget’s and Kohlberg’s approaches is the diminishing of the role of imagination in knowing and rational thought. Piaget sees imagination as associated with childhood fantasy. More specifically, he sees it as a child’s assimilation of reality into schemes.

In order to comprehend faith’s imaginal knowing, the scope of cognition must be expanded (Fowler, p. 105). Fowler maintains that the ultimate goal is to “better understand the inner dialectic of rational logical in the dynamics of a larger, more comprehensive logic of conventional orientation.” A structural-developmental theory of faith must be one of knowing and acting. This theory is neither individualistic nor generalized. It requires a commitment to seriously consider how one’s previous decisions and actions shape an individual’s character. It also necessitates a commitment to acknowledge the impact social communities have on the formation. It involves a recognition that the adoption of unique perspectives and constructions varies based on one’s shared groups or classes.

In approaching the stages of faith, stage 3 is called Synthetic-Conventional Faith and typically arises in adolescence. That being said, it is often where many adults will

plateau or remain permanently (Fowler, p. 172). It is a stage where multiple circles of influence need attention. It needs to combine values and information and provide support for their identity and perspective. This stage is also indicated by a kind of “assimilation” or conformity. Adolescents in this stage are aware of the expectations and judgments of important people within their circles but do not yet have a full picture or understanding of their identity. The individual holds beliefs and values, only they are tacitly held. In stage 3, one possesses an ideology that they haven’t solidified in an examinable way. As a result, they are largely unaware of having it (Fowler, p. 173). When individuals in stage 3 encounter conflicting perspectives on their own, they experience it as a difference in “kind” of person. In other words, they might not consider them “their kind of people.” Another important milestone in this stage is the emergent capacity to formulate a “personal myth.” Fowler describes a personal myth as “[an individual’s interpretation] of their “becoming” in identity and faith, incorporating one's past and anticipated future in an image of the ultimate environment unified by characteristics of personality (Fowler, p. 173). Fowler cites the dangers: over-internalization of others’ expectations that puts future autonomy of judgment at risk, a state of nihilistic despair due to interpersonal betrayal, and compensatory intimacy with God that is unconnected to the mundane (Fowler, p. 173).

Individuals in stage 3 begin moving into stage 4 when an encounter with another perspective or worldview sparks self-reflection and realization. This revelation leads to reflection on the change of their beliefs and values and the ultimate relativity of those values in relation to their specific group or background. In this transitory period, leaving home also sparks self-reflection and self-evaluation of their life and values.

Stage 4, also known as Individuative-reflective faith, is the stage where adolescents or young adults begin to accept accountability for their commitments, beliefs, and actions (Fowler, p. 182). Genuine progress towards and into stage 4 is made when they face conflicts between individual identity and group identity. Fowler asserts that individuals in this stage no longer see their identity as defined by interpersonal circles of influence. They construct a framework, aware of its limits and recognize it as a “world view.” This new understanding is taken into account in their reactions, judgments, and interpretations of self and others. In this stage, symbols are translated into “conceptual meanings (Fowler, p. 182).” A major strength surfaces in stage 4, the ability of critical reflection on identity (self) and outlook (ideology). Fowler suggests that the dangers of the stage rest in its strengths. He maintains that one can develop:

An excessive confidence in the conscious mind and in critical thought and a kind of second narcissism in which the now clearly bounded, reflective self over assimilates "reality" and the perspectives of others into its own world view (Fowler, p. 182).

Fowler describes individuals ready to transition from this stage as “restless,” attending to what may seem like anarchic inner voices and the worrying feeling of stagnation of meaning or purpose. Furthermore, Fowler suggests that “stories, symbols, myths and paradoxes from one's own or other traditions may insist on breaking in upon the neatness of the previous faith” (Fowler, p. 183).

Presentation of the Data:

This chapter serves to describe and explain identity through the lenses of adolescents in higher education. These ideas will be explored and discussed through the lenses of others' experience. Joining the conversation were Junior, Digital Media major Daniel Finn, Junior, Youth Ministry major Abby Washburn, and Senior English and Communications major John Raymond.¹ The first question asked was, "What does it mean to establish a self-identity?" -And each individual had some interesting responses and perspectives to contribute to the discussion.

Finn was the first to comment.

I think that having a self-identity is extremely important to an individual because it shows the nature of who you are as a person. I think, over the course of time, having that certain identity fold and unfold before you can be a really transversal experience because as you grow up from a kid to an adult, it is crazy to see how those ideologies can change and ultimately form your identity, (D. Finn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Washburn approached this question from a different angle.

Yeah, I was thinking about how [much my identity has changed]; even from my freshman year of college to now, being a second-semester junior. But then also (...) tracing it back to my decisions and (...) who I would've identified as when I

¹ Names changed for anonymity.

was younger and how it has shaped my identity now, (A. Washburn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Raymond contributed his insights to the discussion as well, saying

(...) What a person thinks about who they are [is important because it] informs what they feel like they should do with themselves in a sense. [For example], if a person says that they are an artist, then (...) a large portion of what they do with their life might be to make art. (...) Because it informs a lot of what we do, that makes it very important, (J. Raymond, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

The second pair of questions presented were “Was there ever a specific time or moment where you became conscious of a need to find a unique identity? (...) Then talk about a response you had to that specific need.” Finn opened contributed his thoughts, saying

As a kid, being bullied [I got into] these little zones and little worlds where you think. People just get into your head all the time and you have to formulate your own self-opinion. But, for myself, I didn't really get to the point [where I] really needed to be myself until a little bit into my first college experience. I wanted to try and be that cool kid, or I wanted to try to fit in a lot because that was [the cool thing to do]. When you are a kid, you don't [always] know what is going on. It is [a time] of ignorance and a lot of things [can] get to you over time. After [that] college experience, (...) I [became a bit] hardened to that. Dealing with others

[and their] problems, [while having] my own and [other] experiences, [helped me] to form my own identity to be a really caring person and [in helping others]. (...) I like to keep everything [in] reality because I feel like [part of] my identity is being a really blunt friend, (D. Finn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Washburn jumped in as well to say,

Once I came to college, it was interesting because growing up I had an identical twin. So, my identity growing up was a twin sister; where we did all the same sports in high school and shared a bunch of the same classes together. (...) Our high school was pretty big, but we were a package deal. [But for college], we went to colleges that were six hours apart; so I got to, separate myself from her and build my full own identity. So I would say that I had my own identity, we were different, but we kind of fed off each other's identities - and throughout college, I have kind of been able to [almost fully] become my own person. I would say more so when I came to Greenville. Because when I was still running track at Tiffin, which is a Division II school I had a running scholarship [at], I like really identified as a runner. That would have been my main identity. But once I broke my leg, I was like 'oh no..., who am I? Who is this?' - and I had to kind of rebuild my identity again. But I really enjoyed that [process] of learning about myself and to be able to grow so much. [Shifting] my identity away from something [temporary] like running was the best for me to be [a] full person, (A. Washburn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Finn also has experience being an identical twin. He interjected saying,

Growing up (...) people identified us not as our own person, [but as] the ‘ginger twins.’ To this day, there are people I don’t even remember from high school that will come up to me [and say] ‘oh, you’re one of the ginger twins!’ The fact that you [can] get established to that degree, like two peas in a pod forever, is nuts, (D. Finn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Washburn replied,

Yeah, and I think it is hard to build your identity as a twin because [people always grouping you together] so you start grouping yourselves together. Especially since [Jen and I] would spend so much time together. So everyone was like ‘Jen and Abby, Jen and Abby.’ I am my own person. But when I would make different [life decisions] from her, people were like ‘wow, both of you had the same upbringing and what not. So, what’s the difference?’ [I] think it just [boiled down to] how we identified ourselves (A. Washburn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Raymond added,

[I have] two little brothers who are twins and I feel like, as a result of being [a] twin, they have developed in a way that they put a lot of energy into trying [not]

to be like each other. Would [either of you] say that there were particular times that that was big deal for you? (J. Raymond, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Finn responded,

(...) We have had our different standings. [My twin] has always been the smarter of the [the two] of us. When I came to college, I decided I wanted to apply myself and our intelligence kind of evened out. But for the longest time, we had a lot of differences [like that] and we wanted to keep them that way instead of being the same [person] all the time, (D. Finn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Raymond interjected,

So because he was doing well in school, you just kind let him have that space and you decided to do something different? (J. Raymond, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Finn responded,

I think that, once he started getting the better grades, I started (...) demeaning myself. (...) My high school GPA was like a 2.2 and a lot of people probably wouldn't imagine now that I am almost a 4.0 solid student. I [guess] I just didn't

feel the urge to apply myself because my brother [occupied that kind of world]. I mean, I tried [some], but I never felt the urge to really [push myself in the same way]. I was fueled by my art because that was my talent. I just figured that [I didn't need] good grades to get into art school, [I] just needed to be able to draw, (D. Finn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Raymond interjected here,

My brothers have struggled a little bit in high-school, and I feel like this may have been a result of [my success in high school, being salutatorian of my graduating class]. I had a high GPA and I did pretty well for myself there. But I think that it could be that, as a result of that, that my brothers think differently about school and that they apply themselves differently, (J. Raymond, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Finn said,

Siblings will always react [differently] to things. I have definitely gotten through a lot because I have had my brother there. But I have also had [some bad] moments because he has been there. So it's obviously a back and forth thing [with] the connectedness of [being a twin]. I mean, [as twins] you basically share a lot of the same DNA and [there are points] where you definitely feel each other's different struggles and those [can] clash sometimes. [This may not be true]

for many cases, but for [me and my brother], it happened [pretty frequently], (D. Finn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Raymond shared his experience and response to the need to find a unique identity:

I would say that growing up, I didn't feel a (...) need to go out on my own. A lot of me was trying to (...) do what I was told by my parents and make them happy. I wanted to make them proud of me. So that was a lot of school stuff and my dad was into running, so I did that. [Those] became the thing[s] that I did. Really, whenever I was trying to go out and do my own thing I guess, it was just based on an opportunity the school would give me. My parents really didn't push music [on me], but the school had offered band in like 5th grade. I [thought] 'sure, I'll try this.' I started playing the drums. I started there and now I play in the jazz band here [at Greenville], so that's pretty cool. Yeah, so a lot of the striking out wasn't about being different, but rather, what you bump into, (J. Raymond, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Washburn interjected,

I think the parents aspect [you mentioned John], were interesting. It really got me thinking because my parents are married, but my dad has been absent for the majority of my life. [There were many times where] I would have tried to do something, not even bad, but things, like be the best at running in my high school

or, do really well in the basketball game. [Things that] I could at least go home and tell him ‘hey dad, I made it to state in track. Then he’d be like ‘whatever’ [about it]. [So thankfully], it wasn’t acting out in a bad way, but I think that it could have been - and that was (...) the path that my sister went down. [Particularly] in college, she was in a relationship for a long time and I think she put her identity into that relationship. She had her life basically laid out, (...) she was engaged, and then she wasn’t. [She] broke up with him, then she really acted out. Now she’s pregnant with [a guy that she only kind of knows]. But it is insane to think that where she changed her identity to really put it in with partying and things of that nature, I have put [mine] into ministry and finding love through God. Where [my sister], has put it into love. She has put it into people, but people aren’t going to stay. That [love] I would argue is surface-level love. So, with the parents thing, we both would have acted out, but [acting out] doesn’t always have to be [negative], (A. Washburn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Raymond responded,

I guess that kind of made it more difficult for me when I came to college.

(...) In high school I was more quiet I guess, somehow. It is still the case that I have a couple of close friends and I don’t really go out and party.

There are a couple of times where I [have been] connected to people they also play video games I play, or they are on the track team, or they are on the cross country team. Then I will sit at lunch them, or go to practice with

them. I talk to these people, the lunch table is (...) the place where these things (...) happen. But otherwise, I would kind of be on my own. It was definitely a lot harder for me freshman year in that situation because I would be holed up in my room. Then because of that, that experience kind of sucks so you kind of have to strike out more. Then (...) a big group of guys ended up playing video games together in the first-floor lounge of Joy on a fairly consistent basis. There would be an RC there that would bring a desktop or a laptop out and they'd be playing *League of Legends*. We'd have like 4 or 5 or however many other guys out there [doing] the same thing. So it'd just be 'hey, I'm on rounds, wanna go play *League of Legends* in the first floor of Joy?' [That] was the thing to do. So that was the thing to do. I met a lot of good friends that way, (J. Raymond, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

The next question asked was "Were there ever any hard feelings or strong emotions that were associated with those catalyst moments that made you respond in a certain way?" Finn jumped on this question immediately.

My identity was shaped by every [single] bad thing that [I'd] ever [done]. I have no idea where my life would be right now if my brother and I still lived with our original birth parents. The day [Charles and I] found out that we were adopted, wasn't really mind-blowing. We kind of already knew (...) because we were really different from our parents. (...) We always kind of knew with the red hair and

stuff. [But] I think, my art school [days] were the worst parts or some of the deepest parts that affected my views on people. After the bullying, I was a very accepting person. I would take in anybody that was troubled or having issues. 9...) I never cared what their issue was, it could be super bad (...). I just don't judge based on the bad choices people make in life because I think that is stupid. I mean, maybe if you are like are a criminal I might have different opinions in that area. But if you've just done basic things like coping mechanisms and whatnot, I felt the need to accept those people regardless. They are just reaching [for] (...) help in their own way and, (...) [even] I still need my own kind of help. I felt a little bit of joy (...) helping others [and it] made me feel better as a person. [Which I think] just strengthened my identity as a generally accepting person (D. Finn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Washburn shared her experience:

I think the moment my identity became most shifted and I lost my identity as like, a human for a minute was after I was raped. [After that] I was like, 'what are humans?' [Like], how could someone do such a thing? [I] just didn't understand people. But it's really helped me to become more accepting [of] people and [remember] the importance of knowing someone's story. I think a problem for me was that I didn't really have anyone to reach out to; like anyone I was comfortable with. That hurt me, so now [being in residence life], I [make myself] the most accessible person. I'll talk to [residents] at any hour (...) because I want to be the

person that someone is able to talk to [and have listen to them]. So it helped me become who I am, even though it was a horrible experience. But it helped me to (...) recreate my identity. But those feelings [before that] were things like shame, self-doubt and self-hatred that weren't fair to myself. But now I am much more loving towards myself, so it ended alright (A. Washburn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Finn interjected that

I think that [people] who take the hardest hits in their lives are usually the most accepting. I mean, when you've been down that low in the world, you can really [sympathize] with other people. Maybe they haven't had it as bad, but I don't see one trouble as bigger than the other (D. Finn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Washburn cut in,

And that is what I always explain to people too. (...) just because you haven't had the same traumatic experience doesn't mean that is any [lesser] than my own. I feel bad for Christians who claim that 'they've had an easy life' and that their testimony just 'isn't as good.' [It is] just as good. [They have been faithful their entire lives], like that is so incredible to me! I think that letting your experiences shape your identity is so important because, [After] being raped, I could have let

that experience turn me into a bitter person and I could hate people right now.

[But I am thankful that I don't], (A. Washburn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Raymond chimed in, saying

When I was very little (...), there was an interaction where I had just learned that my dad had a brother (...) [named John] and I had never met him. I asked my mom about him because my dad was at work or something, and [she told me that] I needed to talk to dad about it. So, the next day, he was dropping me off [somewhere] and I asked him about [John]. I remember that was the first time I ever saw my dad cry. John was my uncle who died before I was born in a car accident and I was named after him. This became significant for me. It became the reason why I wanted to do what my parents wanted me to do because I thought that this was part of me. At the time it was only school work and stuff, but it was the thing that I felt like I needed to do for them because they put this value on me. I think that was a big part of why I turned out the way that I have. I'd say that first coming to college or needing to find an [identity]. People find identity in the things that they do. Since it has lots to do with community and such, there is a sense of pride and loneliness [present]. [Even if it's not a huge thing], loneliness can still drive people to do the things that eventually end up defining themselves (J. Raymond, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Washburn interjected

(...) Building a good community around you is really important in self-identity. People's actions will eventually [make an impact on you]. (A. Washburn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

The next question was "Were there any specific people, things or experiences that helped you to recapture your identity?" Finn was the first to respond.

My friend, Thomas Bott, (...) has been my number one best friend and there is no one else that is ever going to top that list (...). He was always there, even through all of the bullying. I met him in high school, probably around sophomore year. He knew we were going through a lot of problems and he would always tell us that it was okay and stuff. Of all things, he was gay [and] he was pretty open about it. (...) But at that time it wasn't [as open or acceptable] because people would judge [that group pretty hard]. But he would always reaffirm that everything was going to be okay. I had a really rough sophomore year before he (...) showed up in my life. I had [dealt with] suicide things. (...) I had a whole week where I was basically making lists and doing bad things. But he brought some things into the light [for me]. I had a few religious moments, but after travesty after travesty, you kind of start losing that burning flame. I am glad that with college for a little bit it has kind of started to grow again. I would (...) definitely say that I am not the greatest Christian still, (...) but I feel I am in a lot better shape than I was way

back in high school when I just completely lost all that initiative. (...) A lot of my friends don't believe in God, the majority of my friends are either atheists or agnostics. We still have a [love and acceptance] of each other's ideas. It was like 'you're an atheist and I'm a Christian and that's okay.' I had some friends in art school (...) [and] we all got into some bad stuff. But it was in more of a controlled setting. Like, I wasn't just out there doing stuff because I was a depressed little psycho maniac. A lot of it was just to have a genuinely good time with my friends. I did a lot of [crazy fun]. Having those talks and having those moments even when you're under the influence of things you shouldn't be, are really [opening]. Especially when all of your inhibitors are down (D. Finn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Washburn continued,

I was assaulted when I was only a Junior in high school. But I struggled with it all through high school because I tried to transfer out of the high school. It was near the end of [my] junior year so I just didn't go for the last month or whatever. Then for senior year, I tried to transfer and they were like 'you can't transfer because you won't be able to do sports if you transfer. (...) The superintendent won't approve that.' That was like the meanest thing I'd ever heard but okay. The school I had wanted to transfer to was in our sectional for running and since I had made it to state the year before they [wouldn't] approve that. At that time, my identity was in sports so it was like, the only thing I still clung to. Because I was like 'I

can still play sports no matter what happens.’ But someone that has really walked beside me while I have figured everything out (...) [would be] my boss Niquita Hohm. She has really like walked beside me [even though] this has been like three or four years now. She’s helped me get help and helped me like rediscover confidence in myself. (...) I was even able to speak at Vespers about it and I feel like if I didn’t have Niquita, I definitely would not have been able to get up there and speak in front of a bunch of people. But I would say that she was the one who helped me the most to be able to get help and rediscover who I really am [instead of] who I let others define me as (A. Washburn, personal communication, March 19, 2019)

The next question asked was “How have you seen a shift from that catalyst moment to now, that you are undergraduate students at Greenville. How have you seen development or growth? Finn was the first to speak up.

A lot of it did come from Greenville. Transitioning, I’ve been talking already about how I’ve been an accepting person. I think the biggest thing for me was when I went to school for the first time I lost my sports and stuff (...) for like two and a half years. Especially when I quit college, I never imagined when I came (...) to Greenville I’d have the chance to run. I always assumed that [in] college athletics, you never got the chance if you were slow or you wanted to do it for fun. I am really competitive still, I just genuinely love doing the sport. That fact that Coach Patton and Coach Easley were so open [was important to me].

Regardless of how bad you are, (...) they want to include you. One thing I like is the practice that ‘everyone has a part to play on the team.’ (...) I feel like I’ve played a big role in motivation for the most part. I’ve always been the slowest guy for sure, I’ve never really been faster than anybody on our team. It’s a lot of reflection and I think I see a lot of things that other people don’t because I do run behind a lot of people. I like to stay aware of my other teammates’ feelings. I feel like when I am out on the track cheering for everybody, even if it’s at risk of my own energy, I still like to try and give the others that push that I feel like they could need. It feels really good, even if I had a really rough race. I just like to keep people else motivated around me. It is a really important role for me and I established it since like day one (D. Finn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Raymond commented,

I think the really interesting thing about that is the relationships you’ve developed with people on other teams. You’ve made some friends as a result of entering some cheer squads that you ran with that you cheer for in other races. I think that is really cool. You know people as a result of this that no one else has really taken the time to. Your identity as a Greenville student hasn’t really been limited like some other people (J. Raymond, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Finn replied,

I feel building relationships are a lot more important [than just speed or time]. Because those competitors are there anyway. We wouldn't enjoy our races without those people. Building a healthy relationship with the competitors is a good way that everyone can have fun. But not a lot of people go out and associate with these other teams and I think it is really something. I'll be out [there] cheering for anybody. Especially for the people in the 5k, I'll cheer for every single person regardless of what their jersey is. I know how hard that race is, I really do it stinks! So, I feel like every person needs as much motivation as they can get (D. Finn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Washburn opened up:

I'm a transfer [student] as well and when I came on my visit I was with Keli Pennington. She was making my schedule and we were looking through it. I was looking and I was like 'yeah I want to do history ed or special education.' Then she was (...) telling me, 'I was this major and then I also ended up getting a major in theology.' Now she is at Duke Divinity, but before then when she was still here I was like 'okay you're a theology major. Cool, I am going to be a special education major. Like, have fun with that.' Then, [the] next semester I (...) I became a ministry major. She had the prophetic word in my life. But if I had never [come] to Greenville, I wouldn't have been a ministry major because I was at a secular school, so it wasn't even a thing [there]. Nor did I ever think about it.

But when I discovered that I could do a major where I got to help people and bring the light of God into their lives. [That was perfect] and without Greenville, I wouldn't have been able to do that. [Although people joke about community here at Greenville] because they emphasize it so much. But I've actually been able to build such a good healthy community here. [Through cross country] when I was part of the team and residence life (...) and those people help me to build my identity as well (A. Washburn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Raymond said,

The first time I came to [Greenville] I was trying to do both marching band and cross country at the same time. I really wanted to be able to do both things because I did them both in high school and I just wanted to (...) keep doing the same thing because I enjoyed both. [But] it did not really work. I was able to get away with it for the first [year]. I was in marching band for either the first three or four semesters and the first year I did it I had a friend who was willing to run workouts with me in the mornings because the practices for marching band and cross country were at the same time. That was very helpful. We were pretty close to each other in times and we became really good friends. But after a couple [of] years, he was unable to continue [going to] school here because he kept retaking the ACT and he couldn't get a high enough score in order to continue on the education track. After he had to leave, I just couldn't do it on my own and other people weren't necessarily willing to just do all the workouts for the entire season

in the morning with me. I ended up getting behind in (...) [everything really]. It was a huge load and I would not get the runs most the time that I should have gotten. So I had to cut marching band off and that was really hard for me because I didn't think that I would be able to find another outlet for music and music was something that was important to me. I really enjoyed playing and just being a part of it really. As a percussionist, I don't necessarily think that a lot of things I do are as skilled as some other [musicians]. I can keep a beat, it's nice. I really enjoyed being a part of the drumline in marching band, even though the practice times were awful. It just really hurt to be trying to miss that. So when I went my junior year to try out for the jazz band, I was just thinking, (...) 'this is something maybe that would not get rid of that.' I struggled, but I ended up getting the part and I was really really happy after that. Even though I didn't feel like I did great, the fact I was able to like 'oh I'm in this now. I can practice this and get good at this.' (...) But I thought that that was really important and the fact I can continue to say that I am a musician and continue to say I am a runner. To be able to be a part of those groups at the same time still and not lose that part of myself feels good. I hate the idea of losing anything and I want to hold on to everything, and maybe that is to my detriment. But I think that was an important part of my experience here. (...) [Also], one thing I do a lot because I am so quiet is (...) I don't often put myself in a position to be a part of big groups that are doing a lot of things together. I have small groups of friends. A lot of times I will end up with one or two friends that are really close and I will do everything with that person. I have had a couple of experiences of that during my time here because people have to

leave because people graduate. The fact I have to switch between [people], I'm like 'oh, I've got to find a new person now, crap!' That has been kind of significant. Freshman year, that person for me was the person that I got to run with, Brandon Huber. He was really important to me, then (...) outside of that we studied together sometimes, sitting together at lunch like all the time. I got to third wheel a lot of the time when he was spending time with his girlfriend. Then I ended up meeting some people in Joy that were playing League [of Legends], including Jonathan here. As a result of being in relationships with these different kinds of people, I start to become part of their different groups, the different things that they do. Brandon, in addition to being a runner and playing some video games, he was a big fan of anime. I had never really sat down and watched much anime, but he introduced me to Studio Ghibli films. Then, when I had to spend time with this guy (Jonathan), I got into some more music things that I wouldn't have otherwise been in. One thing I would never have thought I would do when I came to college was be a part of some kind of album release. That was an interesting experience that I'll remember (J. Raymond, personal communication, March 19th, 2019).

Next question, "How would you identify now? Where would your identity be placed now as opposed to where it was before?"

Washburn started.

I would say before Greenville I would sum it up as like a runner or athlete. Now, I much more identify as a Christian. If someone [asked] ‘who are you?’ I would say ‘a Christian’ and I would hope that my actions would emulate that and that people would be able tell through the way I speak (A. Washburn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Finn interjected,

I think back in the day, I would [describe myself as] self-loathing. Now, understandable and accepting would be the two words I would use (D. Finn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Raymond responded,

I could say that I would still describe myself as a perfectionist. Even though I might not do the best at everything, I might not necessarily put out the highest quality work possible. It is something where I hesitate a lot. (...) I get kind of nervous [because] I want it to be as good as it possibly can, [but] there are situations where you can just get it done. In junior high, (...) they awarded students with the ‘most likely to’ awards. I was given the ‘perfectionist.’ (...) I have become a bit more comfortable with those things than I used to be, but I

don't think I would [use] a different word to describe myself, (J. Raymond, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

The next question presented was “In hindsight, what parts of your identity would you say that society has helped impose or mold into your identity? What role has your religious backgrounds or lack thereof played in your identity formation? Were those significant to you?”

Finn said,

I would definitely say they were [significant]. After the bullying got bad, I eventually went to private school from fifth to eighth grade. Amazingly you'd think that going to private school would be a better [experience] you think there would be with better people. But they were still the snarky individuals that just try would berate you regardless. It put this image in me that these people can call themselves Christians can act so mean. I just felt, still loving others is the thing that needs be done because Jesus taught us to 'love your neighbor as yourself.' That is something I've really taken that to heart. As much as I wish I could go back and change some of those things I am [thankful] for those times. But when I reflect on those things, then would I be the same person I am today?

Washburn added,

I think society has a certain viewpoint on someone who was raped and rape culture is a terrible thing in America. That was also intertwined with me being really depressed afterward. [Religiously], I was raised Catholic, I would have identified as Catholic at the time. I was kind of like, ‘well, God loves me and I shouldn’t be depressed because God is my strength.’” But in an unhealthy way because I [felt] like a really terrible catholic because I just couldn’t feel that way. Would I change my experience? No. It has helped me help a lot of people. Either in a similar situation or just dealing with people and hanging out with people. I just value time so much because even if you don’t have a prophetic word to tell them, [just sitting] in silence can do so much more than people can even imagine. But I wouldn’t change anything because it has totally shaped my identity and I wouldn’t be who I am (A. Washburn, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Raymond said,

My family is very religious, to the point where the same summer before I came to school was the time my dad became a pastor. It was interesting because when I was really little, there was a time when my parents didn’t go to church. But my grandparents would come to my house, (...) pick me up, and take me to the church that eventually my family went to. I don’t necessarily understand all of the things behind the way that was. I think my dad had been kind of burned by the church at

some point because he had (...) to moderate something at a large church. The background eventually became a normal thing. It was really important because it was one of the reasons why I ended up [at Greenville] instead of at a state institution. If it were my complete decision coming out of high school, I probably would have (...) gone to some school like SIUE or some larger state school. As a result of being at a big school, you kind of hide in the crowd is what I am told. You have less relationships as a result of their being more people which is really weird to think about. You don't have the same kind of freedom to interact with everybody in a classroom that you do in the lecture halls at another school. This is one of the things my faith led to in my life. My faith really emphasizes the idea of forgiveness in certain situations of people who have done me wrong, in other cases, it makes me be less forgiving of myself. If I do something I feel is wrong, I'll beat myself up about it more because of my faith (J. Raymond, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Data Analysis:

Triangulation was achieved by inviting participants to listen and respond to the conversation a few days later. They were asked how engaging in this conversation affected them and if this recorded account accurately represented them and their experiences. Each of them responded. Triangulation was also achieved through self-reflection on the participant responses and research process.

Finn said,

Of my own volition this representation portrayed the lifestyle and personality I grew up to become in my adult life. Taking this time to talk about it with others really helped to evaluate the structure of how I became me. The effect this had on me is a time to reflect, sometimes it is hard to talk about some things but being open to others and sharing my experiences can hopefully help others in their endeavors (D. Finn, personal communication, April 11, 2019).

Raymond replied,

I don't believe that I was misrepresented in any way throughout this project. I was quoted accurately and, though I may have rambled at times, everything stated here is true. I did find this discussion to be an interesting way of making me think about all of the little things in my life that helped form my identity, and how I am unintentionally influencing how others develop their own senses of identity. I hope that I can use this information to consciously think more about how I am influencing others when I am not trying. I want my brothers or any future children

that I might have to feel free to take or leave anything that's a part of my identity. They can do well and not have to feel like they have to meet some invisible standard associated with my identity (J. Raymond, personal communication, April 11, 2019).

Washburn's stated,

The project affected me in positive ways, because it allowed me to reflect with peers on identity and growth, which aren't usually topics that are talked about. It was a healthy reminder of who I am in Christ. I am thankful that I was in a safe place, where I felt I could be vulnerable. The podcast was an accurate representation of who I am as well (A. Washburn, personal communication, April 11, 2019).

This conversation with these individuals played a huge role in my own journey towards uncovering my self-identity. The level of vulnerability that was present within the discussion served as a reminder that brokenness is not synonymous with weakness. I grew up relatively isolated socially and most times, without an emotionally present male figure to look up to. I attached my value to being successful and sought validation for those accomplishments. When I didn't get them, my self-worth and value dropped significantly. My lens shifted over time as a result of some important people in my lives. I had a great Resident Chaplain my freshman year named Nate who helped me to understand that my value was in my creator, not in my success or failure. I had two roommates who taught me the value of patience and even tested it out at times. Even

when I hit the point where I contemplated suicide my junior year, I had struggled to find my worth. I longed for a purpose and to feel needed and loved. Luckily my roommate was able to step in and prevent me from doing that. Not three months after that I was sexually assaulted by a friend on campus and I didn't know what to say or do. I felt dirty and ashamed. All of these experiences really started making me question if I was lovable at all.

Despite all of these things my lens began to shift a lot. I had struggled with pornography usage since I was 14 years old. When I reflect on those times, I realize that I used it as a coping mechanism when I felt lonely. During my college years, God used people to draw me back towards him. I had largely lost a lot of faith that God cared about me. I believed that he existed and that he was all-loving and all-powerful. But I struggled to feel his presence in my life which had taken so many wrong turns. Over the course of my four years, God provided me with three accountability partners to meet with. I have built edifying relationships with other godly men who are willing to be vulnerable and pick each other up. These have been the most formative things about this portion of my identity journey.

Participating in this conversation was encouraging to me. The fact that people were able to talk about being raped, being bullied, dealing with an emotionally detached parent, or making bad decisions helped me. I was always afraid to let people see my shortcomings. I was afraid that I would end up alone. But Finn, Raymond and Washburn's testimonies all helped me come to terms with my own. They refused to let their shortcomings and their bad experiences define them. These things happened to them and did shape their responses. But they didn't become consumed by them or allow these

trials to make them hateful or vindictive. It showed me that good people can go through traumatic experiences and still come out as good people, stronger people even. My lens has shifted from one of self-deprecation and self-loathing to one of relative peace with my own identity. My God-given identity as his child, created in his image, forgiven, and ultimately loved.

The questions asked during this recorded conversation, provide some more interesting things to think about. When one thinks about developing a unique identity, it is important to think about how an individual's decisions impact the people around them. Raymond pointed out that his actions and decisions to be a good student in high school may have impacted the way his brothers interact and approach their own scholastic endeavors. Washburn suggested that her dad's absence and apathetic nature towards her accomplishments affected the way that both she and her twin sister acted. Finn cited his twin as a reason for his embracing certain life choices. Each individual had their own unique encounter with someone in their life that affected the way they chose to live. People speak into others' identities without telling them what to think. Their actions, personalities, and identities impact the decisions of others who encounter them. This could be because they want to be different or they want to be similar to make the individual proud. Especially during periods of cognitive development, these things can stick subconsciously. This kind of impact is reflective of the synthetic-conventional faith stage (Fowler's third stage of faith).

One of the ways people's identity can be formed is through the association of strong feelings and memorable experiences. These experiences can be life changing whether they were positive or traumatic. In some regard, these catalyst moments can help

dictate one's identity, depending on their response to it. Washburn opened up about being raped and the huge impact it had on her. Washburn suggested that it could have turned her into a hateful or bitter person. The idea that these experiences can shape the lenses that individuals see the world through is scary. She did not, however, allow the traumatic experience to change who she was, but it still stuck to her as one mark in her spiritual formation journey. So, while experiences don't necessarily define one's identity, they still do affect the way our "identity" formation processes unfold. Extreme circumstances are capable of eliciting unpredictable reactions - and identity formation seems to follow a similar process. Finn also talked about his experience of being bullied. He could have resorted to bullying or lashing out at others. Instead, he relied on his friend Thomas as a source of light. One could argue his art school days and desire to go out, party, and be cool were resultant of not being accepted by his peers. But Finn's other tendencies towards selflessness and supporting others pushes back on this idea to some extent. These things, however, are not totally disconnected from the convoluted nature of identity. These could all be related to some level of environmental conditioning where an individual has to adapt to the situation at hand.

Another interesting thing to note is the way that people identify themselves. Often times people identify as what they do or what they put their time into. Both Washburn and Raymond cited that they have or would have defined themselves as a runner, musician, writer etc... This is not an uncommon thing for individuals to do. These are self-classifications or identifications seem linked to the things that hold immense value or importance to them. This value could be tied to a person they admire or want to impress. In other words, they place so much importance on any given thing because it is important

to someone important in one of their circles. Raymond suggested that this was a motivating factor in wanting to be obedient to his parents. He had been named after his late uncle John, someone his dad loved a great deal. Because of this, he felt the weight to live up to the value placed upon him. So this translated into pursuing many things his dad was interested in to make him proud. He also wanted to be successful at those things, so he worked hard to ensure that he achieved those goals. Washburn also cited her experience with a seemingly disinterested father. Her twin sister chose to act out, partying and resorting to “superficial love” as Washburn put it. But she sought to impress her father by achieving in school and sports. Though she was not quite able to gain his approval, her hard work was a response to a desire for approval by someone she valued highly. Circles of influence greatly impact associated parties in the process of identity development and formation.

Religious background also plays a large role in a person’s decision making. It provides a set of values that they can build their character around. In doing this, they have established expectations for how they should conduct themselves in the world and respond to certain situations and crises. Raymond cites his religious upbringing as a reason why he chose to attend Greenville. Many students choose to stay in environments that uphold similar values. Lots of young people leave the church, to the dismay of their parents. The desire to stay in a setting that encourages faith development and personal growth is telling of how an individual wants to identify themselves. Finn struggled with religious ideas, especially after his experience with being bullied. When attended a private school associated with Christianity, he was still bullied. This affected the way he

saw Christians in a negative light - and perhaps this resulted in his hesitancy to identify with the Christian faith.

Conclusion:

The purpose of this research was to describe and explain identity formation and development through the lenses of adolescents' experiences in higher education. The collected research and the analyzed data supports the idea that identity is a shared and fluid construct. It is not something that can be self-produced and it is in constant flux. The data suggests that close circles of community such as family have a large influence on one's constantly developing self-identity, especially during crucial developmental years. It also supports the idea that experiences with particularly strong emotional associations can alter the trajectory of one's identity development. Strong emotional connections with people influence where they place value, regardless of whether those connections are positive or negative. Finally, one's religious background lays a moral and ethical framework through which they make decisions about who they want to become

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