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## Identity Processes in Adulthood: Diverging Domains

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## Abstract

Patterns of identity formation were analyzed in a longitudinal framework, from ages 27 to 36 and then to 42 years of age. Information from all 3 ages was available for 197 participants (100 women, 97 men). A variation of Marcia's (1966) Identity Status Interview included 5 domains: religious beliefs, political identity, occupational career, intimate relationships, and lifestyle. Great variability in identity status assessments was found across the domains at each age level. The domains representing work and family (occupation, relationships, and lifestyle) were more salient for middle-aged adults than were ideological domains (religion and politics). Development along the hypothesized sequence (from diffusion toward achievement) was the most frequent trajectory for all domains, except for political identity, where regression was predominant. Most notably, at age 42, one third of the individuals who were foreclosed or achieved in 3 out of 5 identity domains were diffused in political identity, and one fourth were diffused in religious identity.

## Identity Processes in Adulthood: Diverging Domains

### Introduction

The developmental ordering of the identity statuses originally posed by Marcia (1966), that ego identity develops through four distinct “stages,” (diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement) has been questioned by, for instance, Côté and Levine (1988), and van Hoof (1999). As a result of this debate and associated research, identity development is now generally regarded not as a straightforward process, but rather one that is far more complex (e.g., Archer, 1989; Josselson, 1996; Kroger, 1996; Marcia 1993b; Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999; Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992). It now appears that individuals may move in and out of identity statuses in a manner characterized by variability and fluctuation, rather than in a linear fashion as originally postulated.

Each person’s identity process bears unique features and even an “achieved” identity is not always stable, as crises are encountered during later life phases. As Marcia (1980, 2001) argued, an initial identity stage resolution is not necessarily the final one. Moreover, in advanced societies, a well-developed identity structure needs to be flexible and open to possible changes in relationships or circumstances, and successive identity decisions are inevitable. This variability of a mature identity has been described in terms of moratorium-achievement (MAMA) cycles in adolescence (Marcia, 2002; Stephen et al., 1992), or foreclosure-achievement (FAFA) cycles in later early adulthood (Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2000). This study addressed the issue of the stability of identity formation by analyzing continuity and change in identity status in adulthood from ages 27 to 42 years over three panels.

When Marcia's paradigm has been applied, theoretically unexpected developmental processes have been found in longitudinal studies. Regressive shifts from, for instance, achievement to foreclosure, were explained, in addition to the possible unreliability of the measurement, by the fact that individuals may later reconsider their exploration and commitments (Marcia, 1976), or by the respondent's failing to report some significant piece of information, memory problems, or decrease in significance of a crisis experienced many years prior to the interview (Waterman & Archer, 1990). Regressive development has been further analyzed by, for example, Kroger (1996), who has distinguished three different types of regression: (a) disequilibrium (e.g., movement from achievement to moratorium), (b) rigidification (movement from a phase including exploration to a rigid closure), and (c) disorganization (from any status to diffusion).

Although the utility of maintaining a strict view of hierarchically ordered stage sequences to identity statuses can be seen as limited, there is still reasonably wide consensus about normal development proceeding in terms of a general diffusion- foreclosure-moratorium-achievement sequence. In most research reviews, the developmental approach has been supported within the time frame of adolescence and the transition to adulthood (e.g., Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Waterman, 1999). As Waterman (1999) explained, the identity achievement status is clearly the most developmentally sophisticated status, and diffusion the least sophisticated. The problem with this continuum concept lies with the order of the moratorium and foreclosure statuses. The terms *development* and *regression* of identity formation, indicating a theoretically hypothesized sequence (D-F-M-A) and theoretically unexpected shifts to the opposite direction, are widely used. However, they are still debated and continue to be tested empirically. As Waterman (1999) stated, the patterns in the adult years might not parallel those observed during adolescence and transition to adulthood.

Longitudinal studies are the ideal means of understanding the course of identity. As Kroger (2000b) argues, instead of just analyzing movements into and out of different status categories, more emphasis should be given into analyzing individual identity trajectories involving

combinations of progression, regression, and stability. To enable empirical study of the hypothesized developmental sequence in longitudinal settings, reducing the possible individual trajectories to five general patterns has been proposed and used by, for example, Adams (1999) and Berzonsky and Adams (1999). These patterns of trajectory are: stability, development, regression/development, development/regression, and regression.

Longitudinal studies are the ideal means of understanding the course of identity formation. As Kroger (2000b) argued, instead of just analyzing movements into and out of different status categories, more emphasis should be given to analyzing individual identity trajectories involving combinations of progression, regression, and stability. To enable empirical study of the hypothesized developmental sequence in longitudinal settings, reducing the possible individual trajectories to five general patterns has been proposed and used by, for example, Adams (1999) and Berzonsky and Adams (1999). These patterns of trajectory are as follows: stability, development, regression and development, development and regression, and regression. Identity is often (mistakenly) referred to as a single, uniform or overall concept. However, when empirically studying identity formation, different content areas need to be taken into account. Erikson (1950, 1968) considered occupational and ideological domains as essential to identity. Marcia (1966) further divided the ideological domain into political and religious identity subdomains. Later, interpersonal domains were added to the concept of identity (Grotevant, Thorbecke, & Meyer, 1982). The concept of identity therefore consists of both ideological and interpersonal aspects. However, no general agreement exists about a specific set of domains that would comprehensively comprise the concept of ideology. Instead, the number and area of identity domains vary slightly within numerous studies and methods. For example, the Objective Measure of Ego-Identity Status by Adams (1999) consists of two categories: (a) ideological identity, which comprises occupation, politics, religion, and philosophical lifestyle; and (b) interpersonal identity, comprising sex roles, friendship, recreation, and dating.

Common to the various approaches is that the information measured by the separate domain areas is combined to form a general or overall identity status for each individual. This overall identity status is most often used when, for example, analyzing the typical features of people within the different identity status categories. However, van Hoof (1999) is critical of the fact that it is not always clarified in research reports how the concept of overall identity status has been constituted. As Schwartz (2001) noted, each theorist has selected a set of domains that he or she considers relevant. In Marcia's (1993a) opinion, the areas in which commitment may be manifested may change along with social conditions because different issues may best reflect an individual's identity interests. Therefore, the content areas for the study of identity status should be selected so as to ensure that the content is relevant to the participants during their particular chronological age (Kroger, 2003a; Marcia, 1993a). As Marcia (2001) noted, the content areas can and will change with time, with cultural-ethnic groups and special populations. The domains have to be meaningful to the individuals studied and have some variability of choice permitted by the particular culture. In assessing the overall identity status, a "sign" or indicative approach relies on the most salient domain(s) for the individual, whereas an "additive" approach gives equal weighting to all measured domains (Kroger, 2003b). According to Waterman and Archer (1993), an assignment to the identity diffusion status in any domain suggests that it is not salient, whereas an assignment to any other status suggests that the domain is meaningful and salient for the individual.

Identity development has been primarily studied with reference to adolescents, although the process neither begins nor ends during the adolescent years (Kroger & Haslett, 1987, 1991; Marcia, 1980, 1993a; Whitbourne & VanMannen, 1996; Whitbourne, Zuschlag, Elliot, & Waterman, 1992). Recently, identity development in adulthood has been a topic of growing interest (see, e.g., Kroger 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Marcia, 2002). After reviewing existing longitudinal investigations of identity status movements from late adolescence through early adulthood, Kroger (2000a, 2000b) found that

approximately half of the participants in all studies had remained foreclosed or diffused across all identity domains in each study.

Previous results from these longitudinal data sets on identity development from age 27 to 36 showed a statistically significant tendency for identity diffusion and moratorium to decrease, and foreclosure and identity achievement to increase in each domain, except for political ideology, in which diffusion increased (Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2000). Changes in the overall identity status were more often directed to identity achievement and foreclosure than to diffusion or moratorium. Foreclosed and achieved identities were the most stable and moratorium the least stable identity category. Pulkkinen, Nurmi, and Kokko (2002) compared identity outcomes at ages 27 and 36 to individual personality goals in adulthood, finding that the participants who had few personal goals were characterized by identity diffusion. Individuals with goals for personal growth or global issues were most highly characterized by identity achievement.

The primary aim of this study was to analyze the patterns of identity formation in adulthood at the ages of 27, 36, and 42. To begin, we calculated the distributions of identity statuses separately for five domains at each age level. The aim of this phase was to produce information about the identity status distributions across the various domains and ages, and about the possible differences between the sexes. The stability of identity was expected to vary across status categories. This analysis also provided information about the salience of the domains at different ages. In the second phase, the congruence of identity status ratings across domains was examined at each age level, to analyze the scope and strength of the concept of an overall identity status. In the third phase, patterns of individual identity development were followed within each domain through the three assessments. The frequencies of progression, stability, and regression were compared, with the aim of testing how the paradigm of identity development is applicable to identity development at adult ages; that is, whether there was a significantly greater tendency for identity progression than regression, and for stability of committed identity than for stability of noncommitted statuses (see,



e.g., Waterman, 1999). Finally, we analyzed domains that were incongruent with the dominant identity status at the three measurement points. The purpose was to gain understanding about those domain areas that typically are the most meaningful for adult participants, and whether there are domains that are left aside as adult identity is constructed.

Based on the earlier results of Pulkkinen and Kokko (2000), special attention was paid to political identity, and whether the increase of identity diffusion and the decrease of salience in that domain continue when the participants are facing middle age. According to Pastorino and Dunham (1997) and Lewis (2003), there appears to be more diffusion for politics as compared with the other domains at college age. Lewis (2003) has suggested that politics might be an area considered less important at young ages, with explorations and commitments in this domain put aside until they appear more necessary. On the other hand, Kroger and Haslett (1987, 1991) found in their studies from midadolescence to midadulthood that the probability of diffusion was highest in the religious domain. Their investigation was conducted in the New Zealand cultural context.

Few studies have compared women's and men's identity statuses at adult ages (Waterman & Archer, 1993). Most of the recent studies among adolescents and young adults have failed to find gender differences in the overall identity status, and when domain-specific differences have been reported, especially in the interpersonal domains, men have a tendency to exhibit higher identity diffusion and foreclosure scores, and women higher identity achievement scores (see, e.g., Lewis, 2003, for a recent review). Another domain of reported gender differences is political identity, in which Archer (1989) has found the most significant domain-specific gender differences, with young men being more typically politically foreclosed and women diffused. Pastorino and Dunham (1997) reported that men were more likely to explore and commit in politics whereas women remained more typically diffuse; Lewis (2003) found specifically that, in the domain of politics, young men scored significantly lower in identity diffusion and higher in identity achievement than women. In

this study, we analyzed the results separately for women and men to find possible gender-related differences in adult participants.

## Method

### *Participants*

The study was part of the Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Personality and Social Development. The original random sample of the study consisted of 8-year-olds, 173 girls and 196 boys, born in 1959. The sample comprised 12 complete regular school classes situated in downtown and suburban areas of the town of Jyväskylä, Finland. The sample was ethnically homogeneous, consisting of Finnish-speaking, mostly Lutheran, Finns.

The identity interviews were conducted on 291 participants (142 women, 149 men) at age 27 in 1986, 277 participants (133 women, 144 men) at age 36 in 1995, and 242 participants (120 women, 122 men) at age 42 in 2001. Information on identity status at all three ages was available for 197 participants (100 women, 97 men). In addition, information was available on two of the measurement points for 84 participants (38 women, 46 men): 51 participants took part in the interviews at ages 27 and 36, 18 at ages 27 and 42, and 15 at ages 36 and 42. There were 51 participants (19 women, 32 men) who participated in the interview at only one measurement point (25 only at age 27, 14 only at age 36, and 12 only at age 42). Because all participants did not take part in all of the three identity interviews, there was more data available on each separate age level than longitudinal data concerning the entire period studied. The identity statuses frequencies of those participants interviewed only one or two times did not differ significantly from the identity statuses of the participants who were interviewed at all three ages. Comparisons were made on the

basis of the frequencies of identity status classifications across five domains at the ages of 27, 36, and 42.

No systematic attrition has been found in the sample. The sample was, at ages 36 and 42, representative of the population of Finnish citizens born in 1959 when compared with data derived from Statistics Finland of, for instance, marriage rate and family type, number of children, and employment status. At age 42, 53% of the participants were in their first marriage, 8% were in their second or third marriage, 19% cohabited, and 20% were single. Eighty-five percent had children. The education and occupational status of the male participants was similarly distributed as in the age cohort group. The women had slightly higher education in the sample than in the age cohort group, and, consequently, there were more women in lower white-collar workers, and less in blue-collar workers in the sample than in their cohort group. A difference did not exist in the higher white-collar workers. The women had a corresponding higher education than men both in the sample and in the entire age cohort. Most (83%) of the participants were employed at the time of the interview; 73% of women participants and 80% of men were full-time employed.

Between the first two measurement points in adulthood, in 1986 and 1995, major political changes took place in Eastern Europe as a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although Finland never belonged to the Socialist bloc, Russia and Finland share a lengthy border.

The sudden major changes in the extremely large neighboring country affected Finland by triggering an economical recession and a hardening of the political climate, as well as challenging many individuals' beliefs regarding socialist ideology and the whole political system based on right-wing and left-wing ideologies. Additionally, Finland joined the European Union in 1995. The national economy of Finland was in great difficulty in the early 1990s, as indicated by a high unemployment rate that increased from about 3% to 18% between 1990 and 1995. By 2001, the unemployment rate had fallen to about 9%. The most recent interviews were carried out during the winter and spring of 2001, before the events of September 11, 2001, in the United States.

### *Measures and Procedure*

The identity interview, based on Marcia's (1966, 1980, 1993a, 1993b) identity status paradigm, was conducted at ages 27, 36, and 42. The semistructured interview included five domains: religious beliefs, political ideology, occupational career, intimate relationships, and lifestyle. The opening questions were as follows: (a) "Do you have a personal relationship to religion?" (b) "Do you have a political opinion?" (c) "Do you have a conception of your occupational career?" (d) "Do you have an idea of what you expect from a close relationship?" and (e) "Do you have an idea of the lifestyle according to which you would like to live?" In addition, the participants were asked about how they had acquired their views, for example, from significant others, or by personal exploration.

Each participant's identity status (diffused, moratorium, foreclosed, or achieved) was assessed for each domain using two criteria: the firmness of personal commitment and the presence (+) or absence (–) of a period of exploration or "crisis." The commitment dimension describes the person's firmness in adhering to a particular opinion. Using these dimensional categorizations, four identity statuses were defined: diffused (– [or past +] exploration, – commitment), moratorium (+ exploration at the moment, – commitment), foreclosed (– exploration, + commitment), and achievement (+ exploration, + commitment).

Each identity interview was carried out as part of a more comprehensive data collection, in a session that took 2 to 3 hr. Trained interviewers (11 for age 27, 14 for age 36, and 17 for 42) collected data at each of the measurement points. The interviewers had an academic training in psychology or were graduate students in psychology. A specific interviewer training including a rehearsal interview was carried out for each collection period. Interviewers of the later samples

were unaware of the previous identity statuses of the interviewees. The identity status coding was done as a process, where the statuses were coded both by the interviewers, and, based on transcriptions, by a recoder unaware of the interviewer's coding. After the double (or in some cases triple) coding, the coding differences were checked, discussed, and corrected if deemed necessary. The consensus coding was used for data analysis. At age 27, the percentage of full agreement between an interviewer and the second coder was 76.2%, at age 36 it was 87.8%, and at age 42 the corresponding percentage was 88.3%.

At age 42, an additional reliability coding was made with a third rater to measure the interrater reliability, and an agreement level of 86.0% between the consensus coding and the third coder was reached. Half of the coding differences of the 42-year interview were due to the fact that many of the interviewees themselves had difficulties in interpreting whether their commitments were acquired from others or as the result of exploration.

### *Data Analysis*

The analysis was divided into two phases. First, each age level was analyzed separately in a variable-oriented approach. This method allowed the use of interview information of all participants at each age level ( $N= 291$  at age 27,  $N=283$  at age 36, and  $N= 243$  at age 42). The distributions of identity statuses in each domain, the congruence of the identity status across domains, and the overall identity status were observed. The identity categories were measured on a nominal scale. Therefore the data analyses were largely based on cross-tabulations of identity statuses at ages 27, 36, and 42 for each identity domain, and for the identified overall identity status, separately for men and women. Chi-square testing was used to measure the significance of differences, and the Adjusted Standardized Residuals used to find the areas of difference between the genders.

The McNemar Test for the Significance of Changes for Two Related Samples was then used to measure the significance of the changes in the dominant identity status between the age levels. The comparisons between each two age levels included all interviewees that had taken part in both levels. According to Siegel (1988), this test is particularly applicable to “before and after” designs, in which people could serve as their own controls, and in which measurement is in the strength of either a nominal or ordinal scale.

In the second phase of the study, the longitudinal approach was used to follow identity formation at an individual level. In this phase, the data consisted of the 197 (100 women, 97 men) participants who had taken part in all three interviews. Trajectories of progression and regression in identity formation, as well as stability over three instances of testing, were measured.

As identity, divided into the four categories (D-F-M-A), is observed across the three episodes of testing, 64 distinct patterns may be observed. This variability can be reduced to five general

trajectories (see Adams, 1999; Berzonsky & Adams, 1999): 1) Stability (e.g. A-A-A), 2) Development (e.g. D-M-A), 3) Regression/Development (e.g. F-D-A), 4) Development/Regression (e.g. D-F-D), and 5) Regression (e.g. F-D-D). Since categories 2 and 3 reflect progressive development, and categories 4 and 5 regressive change along the hypothesized sequence, these five trajectories were further reduced to three: Stability (1), Progression (2+3), and Regression (4+5). The significance of the different trends of identity formation was compared to what could be expected on the basis of random, equal distribution. If the changes were random, progression would occur in 33 % of the cases in the three-categories analysis.

The stability rates for different statuses were measured and cross-tabulated for each domain, and for the overall identity. Gender differences were measured by chi-square testing.

The individual trends of changing salience across the domains were followed by analyzing the incongruently diffused domains, and comparing the separate domains with each other. A cross-tabulation was used at each age level to assess the congruity between each domain and the overall identity. This analysis highlighted those domains that most frequently were diffuse, although the individual was committed on the level of the overall identity.

## Results

### *Distribution and Salience of Identity Statuses*

The distributions of identity statuses at different age levels were first cross-tabulated across sex, each domain separately, to obtain a basic measure of the identity structure. As Figure 1 demonstrates, great variability in identity statuses existed across the domains at each age level.

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INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

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*Age 27.* In early adulthood, the majority of the participants had not reached the status of achievement in any domain. In intimate relationships, half of the women but only a third of the men had reached achievement; men's most frequent status was diffuse. The occupational goals were still unclear for many: moratorium was most frequent in that area. The percentage of moratorium in the occupational identity was 37.3 % for women and 42.3 % for men, several times higher than the corresponding percentage in the other domains. Lifestyle identity was the second-highest domain in the degree of current exploration, although the mode was foreclosure for both sexes. The most frequent identity status in political and religious identities for both sexes was diffusion, implying low salience compared to the domains involving more current exploration and commitment.

In addition to the variability across domains, significant gender differences were identified. Diffused identity was more characteristic of men than of women in several domains. In the domain of religion, foreclosed identity was more typical of women and diffusion more typical identity of men,  $\chi^2 (3, N = 291) = 15.84, p = .001$ ; in intimate relationships, achievement was more typical of women and diffusion of men,  $\chi^2 (3, N = 290) = 19.35, p = .000$ ; and also in lifestyle identity, men outnumbered women in diffusion,  $\chi^2 (3, N = 291) = 7.89, p = .048$ . In the domains of occupational and political identities, no gender differences were found at age 27.

*Age 36.* The great majority of participants had made identity commitments in the domains of occupational identity, intimate relationships, and lifestyle by reaching foreclosure or achievement. Exploration at this age was rare. Moratorium was at age 36 less frequent in all domains than at age 27. In the domain of political identity, the most frequent status was diffused for both sexes. For



women, the percentage of diffused identity had even risen from 42 % at age 27 to 51 % at age 36; there was a trend that women outweighed men in diffusion,  $\chi^2(3, N=283) = 7.30, p = .063$ . As a counterpoint, men were more typically diffused and women foreclosed in religious identity,  $\chi^2(3, N = 281) = 9.36, p = .025$ . In the domain of intimate relationships, women were more typically achieved while men outnumbered women in the foreclosed identity,  $\chi^2(3, N = 283) = 12.33, p = .006$ . In occupational identity men were more often foreclosed than women,  $\chi^2(3, N = 282) = 8.19, p = .042$ . There were no gender differences in lifestyle identity at age 36.

*Age 42.* As compared to the earlier assessments, the distributions of most identity statuses demonstrated a developmental shift along the hypothesized sequence towards identity achievement. In occupational identity and intimate relationships for both sexes, as well as in religious and lifestyle identity of women, the most frequent status was achievement. Foreclosure was the most typical status of men in lifestyle identity, although they were classified achieved nearly as often. Moratorium status in any domain was a rare exception. The ideological identities composed a contradiction to the general view; the most typical status in political identity, and for men also in religious identity, was still diffused. Diffused identity was distinctively the most typical identity (58.3 %) of women in politics, while men were classified politically diffused and foreclosed nearly as often; the gender difference was significant,  $\chi^2(3, N = 243) = 15.03, p = .002$ . In the occupational domain, achievement was more typical of women and foreclosure of men,  $\chi^2(3, N = 242) = 8.64, p = .034$ . In intimate relationships, nearly two thirds of women were achieved, whereas significantly more men than women were classified as diffused,  $\chi^2(3, N = 242) = 20.00, p = .000$ . The proportion of men's diffused identity in intimate relationships at age 42 (21.3 %) was high compared to the low proportion at age 36 (9.6 %), demonstrating regression in this respect. There were no gender differences in the domains of religious and lifestyle identities.

The frequencies and gender differences above were based on the maximum number of participants at each age level. We reran the same analyses with only those 197 participants who had participated in all three measurement points. These analyses gave generally the same results with only minor changes in *p* values.

### *Congruence on Identity Status Across Domains and Overall Identity Status*

The percentage of the participants who had the same identity status category in all five domains did not increase with age; it was 7.2 % at age 27, 3.5 % at 36, and 9.5 % at age 42. The median number of the same-status classifications across five domains at all age levels (27, 36, and 42) was three. The frequency of the same status classification across three or more domains out of five increased with age similarly for both genders: from 58.4 % at age 27 to 77.9 % at age 36, and to 77.2 % at age 42. For these individuals, the overall identity status was identified on the basis of what identity status was congruent for three or more domains. Consequently, 42 % of the participants at age 27, and 22 % at ages 36 and 42 did not have such a dominant identity status. For these participants, the overall identity status was determined only on the level of commitment (F + A) vs. noncommitment (D + M).

The distributions of the (dominant) overall identity statuses at the three age levels manifested an increase of achievement from early to later adulthood, and a reduction of moratorium. *Achievement* was the overall identity status for 18 % of women at age 27, for 30 % at age 36, and for 51 % at age 42. The corresponding percentages for men were 20 %, 22 %, and 33 %. In *Foreclosure* there was a high peak at age 36 for both sexes, when 34 % of women, and 47 % of men were foreclosed. At age 27 only 17 % of women, and 9 % of men were foreclosed, and the rate at age 42 was 14 % for women, and 27 % for men. *Moratorium* was the least frequent overall identity

status: 6 % of women and 10 % of men had a dominant moratorium identity at age 27, at age 36 it dominated for only 4 people (1.4 %), and at age 42 for no one. *Diffusion* was most prevailing at youngest age: it was the dominating status for 16 % of women and 22 % of men at age 27, for 10 % of both women and men at age 36, and for 11 % of women and 17 % of men at age 42. The distribution of the overall identity status of men and women was uniform at ages 27 and 36. The gender difference emerged at age 42, when women significantly outweighed men in the achievement category, and reciprocally, more men were classified into the foreclosed identity,  $\chi^2(3, N = 243) = 10.91, p = .012$ .

In an analysis using reduced binomial categories of commitment – noncommitment we found that the majority of the participants had a committed overall identity in adulthood. For women, the frequency of overall commitment increased from 62.0 % (age 27) to 83.5 % (age 36), and to 89.2 % (age 42), and for men, respectively, from 46.3 % to 84.7 %, and to 81.1 %. According to the McNemar Test for the Significance of Changes for Two Related Samples, the shift from noncommitted to committed overall identity categories was significant from age 27 both to age 36,  $\chi^2(1, N=248) = 51.24, p = .000$ , and to age 42,  $\chi^2(1, N = 215) = 51.25, p = .000$ . Commitment did not increase between ages 36 and 42, but a developmental shift from foreclosed to achieved identity took place. The finding was similar for both genders.

According to the indicative approach, a single achievement status in a salient domain is adequate to determining an achieved overall identity status. In the present study, the number of those who had an achieved identity in at least one domain was 69.7 % for women and 63.1 % for men at age 27, 74.4 % for women and 69.4 % for men at age 36, and 89.2 % for women and 76.2 % for men at age 42. Women outnumbered men significantly in achievement at age 42,  $\chi^2(1, N = 242) = 7.06, p = .008$ .

*Identity Process: Trajectories Through Adulthood*

The frequencies of patterns of individual identity formation were followed through three measurement points. The percentage of participants displaying stability, progression, and regression was calculated for each identity domain and for each gender separately. The analysis followed Berzonsky and Adams (1999) in their summary of several longitudinal studies, using the developmental order of diffusion – foreclosure – moratorium – achievement (D-F-M-A). The results were presented using the categories of stability, development, and regression. In these analyses, both direct (following the developmental order of D-F-M-A) and fluctuating (e.g. F-D-A) ways of progression were combined, and the same applies for regression.

The hypothesized sequence (D-F-M-A) was the most frequent trajectory for both men and women in the domains of occupational identity, intimate relationships, and lifestyle identity, where the developmental change was significantly greater than could be expected on the basis of a random, equal distribution (Table 1). The domain of political identity was contrary to the other domains, with a regressive trajectory being the most typical trajectory for both men and women. In the religious domain, no trend was more typical than the others.

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A further analysis showed that there was considerable variation in both progressive and regressive development. Inside the progressive trajectories, the proportion of fluctuating trajectories was 34 % on the average. It ranged from 26 % in the religious domain to 41 % in the political and lifestyle identity. Correspondingly, 43 % of the regressive trajectories fluctuated, ranging from 30 % in the intimate relationships to 50 % in the religious identity.

In a four-grade scale like the one used (D-F-M-A), the trajectories must be considered together with the initial status level to exclude the possible ceiling effect. The lower the initial status level, the higher the potential is for progression to take place. However, when this was taken into account, the contrast between the domains became even more striking. Those domains with the strongest progressive trends (occupational, intimate relationships, and lifestyle) had the lowest rates of diffusion at age 27. Comparatively, the diffusion rate at age 27 was high in religious identity, where the rates of both stability and progression were relatively high, and in political identity, where a regressive trend was demonstrated (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

The only statistically significant difference between the genders in the trajectories was found in occupational identity, where identity development was more typical of women, and regressive development of men,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 197) = 8.16, p = .017$ .

### *Stability of Identity Statuses*

To supplement the analysis of the trends, a further analysis of stable identity statuses was carried out. As expected, moratorium was the least stable status. It remained stable only for one woman in the domain of lifestyle identity. The stability rate for the other statuses through the three measurements varied across domains as follows: political identity (A: 14%, F: 15%, D: 45%), religious identity (A: 44%, F: 32%, D: 35%), occupational identity (A: 22%, F: 20%, D: 0%), intimate relationships (A: 35%, F: 26%, D: 8%), and lifestyle identity (A: 25%, F: 25%, D: 8%). As these figures demonstrate, diffuse status was more likely to remain stable in the ideological identities than in the other domains in which the committed statuses were the most stable ones.

There were gender differences in three domains. In political identity, women were more likely to stay diffused, and men achieved,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 47) = 7.97, p = .019$ . In other words, among those who

stayed in the same status category throughout the follow-up, the proportion of diffusion was for women 85 %, and for men 50 %, while the corresponding figures for achieved political identity was for women 4 %, and for men 30 %. In religious identity, women stayed more frequently foreclosed (women 32 %; men 3 %) and men diffused (women 29 %; men 67 %),  $\chi^2(2, N = 61) = 11.95, p = .003$ . In intimate relationships, men were more likely to stay diffused (women 0 %; men 27 %) and women achieved (women 78 %; men 40 %),  $\chi^2(2, N=43) = 10.24, p = .006$ .

### *Incongruent Domains and Overall Identity Formation*

The individual formation of the overall identity was further analyzed by scrutinizing possible individually non-congruent domains through the three measurement points. Each domain's status category was compared to the individual's overall identity status. To enable the analysis for all participants, including those who did not have a single dominant status for overall identity, and to highlight the trends of change in identity commitment, we used the binomial categorization of committed–noncommitted for the overall identity. The follow-up data consisted of the 197 participants who had participated in all three interviews.

As described earlier, the majority of the participants had a committed overall identity throughout the study (54 % at age 27, 84 % at age 36, and 85 % at age 42). Since the overall identity status was assigned on the basis of three (out of five) same-category domains, it allowed for incongruences to occur in single domains. As Figure 2 demonstrates, the two ideological identity domains (political and religious identity) were often incongruent with the individual's dominant status classification, and largely remained diffuse even when the individual was committed in most other identity domains. At age 42, half of the women with dominant commitment (52 %) and nearly a third of the men (28 %) had diffuse political identity, and one-fourth of women and a third of men

had an incongruently diffuse religious identity. By comparison, in the domains of occupation, intimate relationships and lifestyle, the domain-specific status was nearly always in line with the committed dominant identity.

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INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

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Due to the small number of participants who had a dominantly noncommitted identity at ages 36 and 42 ( $n = 28$  and  $26$ , respectively), we do not present the corresponding results for incongruently committed domains.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to add to the knowledge about identity status distributions in adulthood, and to analyze the patterns of identity formation through adulthood from the age of 27 to the ages of 36 and 42, in a longitudinal setting, comparing patterns for the two genders. The findings showed that great variability existed across the identity domains at each age level, and with both cross-sectional and longitudinal methods.

An overview of the distribution data implied an increase of commitment with age. There was an increase in foreclosure identity from age 27 to 36, whereas the achieved identity increased between the ages of 36 and 42. As could be expected, moratorium became less frequent with age, and was most frequent in all domains at age 27, and least frequent at age 42. At age 27, many participants were preoccupied with exploring their occupational goals; in this domain, the

percentage of moratorium was several times higher than the corresponding percentage in the other domains. The great majority of both men and women were committed in the domains of occupational identity, intimate relationships, and lifestyle identity at ages 36 and 42. Actively ongoing exploration at ages 36 and 42 was rare in any domain.

In the ideological domains of political and religious identity, the rate of diffusion stayed high throughout the study. According to earlier studies (e.g., Lewis, 2003; Pastorino & Dunham, 1997), there has been more diffusion regarding politics as compared to the other domains at college age and early adulthood. This study indicates that the salience of politics did not increase with age for this sample. Instead, it appears that the domains that demand for concrete, everyday actions in work and family are the most salient for middle-aged adults. This finding is consistent with Whitbourne's (1986) study where 87% of the adult participants regarded family as their major area of identity.

Whitbourne (1986, p. 4) concluded that "together, the areas of family and work unite into an integrated sense of identity as an individual with a purpose in life; a purpose that is expressed in the everyday activities carried out at home and in the workplace." The large proportion of diffusion in ideological identities could also be seen as a characteristic feature of the late-modern or postmodern society. Postmodernists like Preston (1997) see identity as unstable, flexible, and adapting, according to convenience at that time. At the same time, Wallerstein (1996) argued that the heretofore dominating political ideologies are losing their meaningfulness in the Western societies. Gender differences varied both between the domains within any age level and between the different age levels. Generally, as in much earlier research (see, e.g., Lewis, 2003), women outnumbered men in the rate of achievement, most consistently in intimate relationships. This gender difference remained significant through all age levels, with women being achieved more often than men, and men outnumbering women in the diffusion and foreclosure categories. The finding is concurrent with earlier findings that, at a young age, women develop earlier than men in interpersonal domains. In the domains of political and occupational identity, the significance of gender differences was



greater at older age levels, whereas it became smaller in the domains of religious and lifestyle identity. In the two domains where gender difference increased with age, men outnumbered women in the foreclosure classification. Meanwhile, women had developed an achieved occupational identity more often than men, but the most frequent status for women in the political identity was diffusion. On the contrary, in the areas where the significance of gender differences decreased with age (religious and lifestyle identity), women were less frequently diffused and more frequently foreclosed than men. As determined by the rate of diffusion, the political identity for women and the religious identity for men remained the least salient throughout the follow-up.

Second, a further purpose of this investigation was to examine the congruence of identity statuses across domains, and to give insight into the concept of overall identity status. An overall identity status was determined for the majority of the participants based on their dominating status category (three same-status classifications across five domains). However, for 42% of the participants at age 27, and for 22% at ages 36 and 42, there was no single dominating status category, and the overall identity status could be determined only on the level of commitment (F + A)–noncommitment (D + M).

Consistent with earlier research on postadolescence identity development (Kroger & Haslett, 1987, 1991; Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2000; Whitbourne & Van-Mannen, 1996), a developmental shift toward achievement could be demonstrated in the overall identity status from early to middle adulthood. There was a significant shift from noncommitted to committed overall identity status categories from age 27 both to age 36, and to age 42. The rate of commitment (A + F) was over 80% for both men and women at age 36, and did not increase any more between ages 36 and 42. However, a developmental shift from foreclosed to achieved identity took place for both genders. Although fewer than 20% of both women and men had an achieved identity at age 27, it was the most predominant category for both sexes at age 42, with rates of 34% for men and 52% for

women. If achievement is defined as the optimal endpoint of identity formation, the aforementioned rates of achievement are still low at age 42, and for men even lower than those for early adulthood in Kroger's reviews (2000a, 2000b).

To elaborate the finding, we estimated the achieved overall identity alternatively, approximating the indicative approach (Kroger, 2003a). Assuming that an achieved status indicates that the domain is salient (Waterman & Archer, 1993), we gave a rough estimate on achieved overall identity status to the participants, based on achievement on a single domain. Comparing to the aforementioned method of three congruent domains, this method increased the overall identity achievement rates from 37% to 51%, depending on age and gender. Although we used a rough estimate on achievement, this notion calls for a careful consideration and detailed description of how the overall identity status is constituted in further studies. The developmental trend toward achievement was confirmed through both approaches. Both methods also evidenced that women outnumbered men in achievement at age 42.

In the third phase of this study, we analyzed the individual identity formation and identity structure from age 27 to 36 and 42. The developmental trajectories were individualized, as Josselson (1996) noted earlier. Interestingly, we found that when the overall identity status was developing toward achievement with increasing age, it was often based overwhelmingly on the three domains of occupational, intimate relationships, and lifestyle identities. In the literature, occupational identity is often categorized as part of the ideological identity, together with political and religious identity (e.g., Adams, 1999). In this study, however, this domain appeared to correspond more with intimate relationships and lifestyle identity, thereby forming a highly salient "work and family" cluster comparable to Whitbourne's (1986) findings. A general trend toward identity achievement, according to the identity development paradigm, was demonstrated in all three domains.

Contrary to the aforementioned finding, there was a significantly strong regressive trend in political identity, in which diffusion for women and foreclosure for men increased with age. In religious identity status, the trends were more ambiguous. Half of the women with a committed overall identity status were diffused in political identity, and a fourth in religious identity at age 42. The corresponding rates for diffusion for men were a third in religious identity and almost as many in political identity. This finding again indicated that these domains were not of great importance in the lives of the participants. The generally accepted consensus politics practiced by the Finnish political parties and the prevailing Lutheran religion might not encourage exploration of identity in these domains. Finland's joining the European Union appears not to have encouraged political exploration either, which is visible in the decreasing voting rates, too. In Erikson's (1950) opinion, political ideals are an essential part of the structure of human conscience. It is obvious that regressing political ideals may make the democratic system vulnerable, because it is based on individual's opinions. Whether ideological diffusion has implications for personal well being, for instance, remains to be studied. Relatedly, Josselson (1996) found that those women who had engaged in moral purpose in their lives seemed to be among the most vital of the participants.

The time span of the study was 15 years, extending from early to middle adulthood. A disadvantage was that there were several years between the measurement points, which, as Kroger (2000b) noted, undermines the possibility to assess continuous movements of identity over time. As Caspi and Roberts (2001) pointed out, there is also a limitation of historical specificity in the longitudinal studies, when assessing members of a single birth cohort. However, longitudinal studies of adult identity are rare, and this study adds to the knowledge of adult identity processes with a data representative of a cohort of Finnish population. In this study, we were able to find continuing identity progression through adulthood in most domains, as well as in overall identity status. However, some interesting inconsistencies were found in the diverse identity formation process of separate domains, especially about the position of political and religious identities. In

these domains, incongruent diffusion was frequent for both men and women, and their contrast to other domains increased with age. Further study is needed about whether there are implications of such incongruently diffused ideological identity for personal well-being. The results indicate that careful consideration should be given to the identity contents, and to the method of assigning an overall identity status.

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Table 1.

*Percentages of Participants Displaying Stability, Development, or Regression when Identity Was Assessed at Ages 27, 36, and 42. Significance of the Change Was Measured with NPar  $\chi^2$ -test Expecting All Categories Equal (N=197, Women 100 /Men 97), Women and Men Analyzed Together.*

	Stability (S)	Development (D) (D-F-M-A)	Regression (R) (A-M-F-D)	$\chi^2$ 3 classes (df=2)
Political Identity				R
Women	27.0 %	32.0 %	41.0 %	18.95***
Men	20.6 %	24.7 %	54.7 %	
Religious Identity				n.s.
Women	31.0 %	38.8 %	32.0 %	2.86
Men	31.6 %	41.0 %	27.3 %	
Occupational Identity				D
Women	9.0 %	72.0 %	19.0 %	91.41***
Men	8.2 %	54.7 %	37.1 %	
Intimate relationships				D
Women	28.0 %	49.0 %	23.0 %	29.83***
Men	15.6 %	54.2 %	30.2 %	
Lifestyle Identity				D
Women	16.0 %	49.0 %	35.0 %	26.23***
Men	20.6 %	44.4 %	35.1 %	

*Note.* D-F-M-A = diffusion – foreclosure – moratorium – achievement, A-M-F-D = achievement – moratorium – foreclosure – diffusion

p < .001

**FIGURE CAPTIONS**

Figure 1.

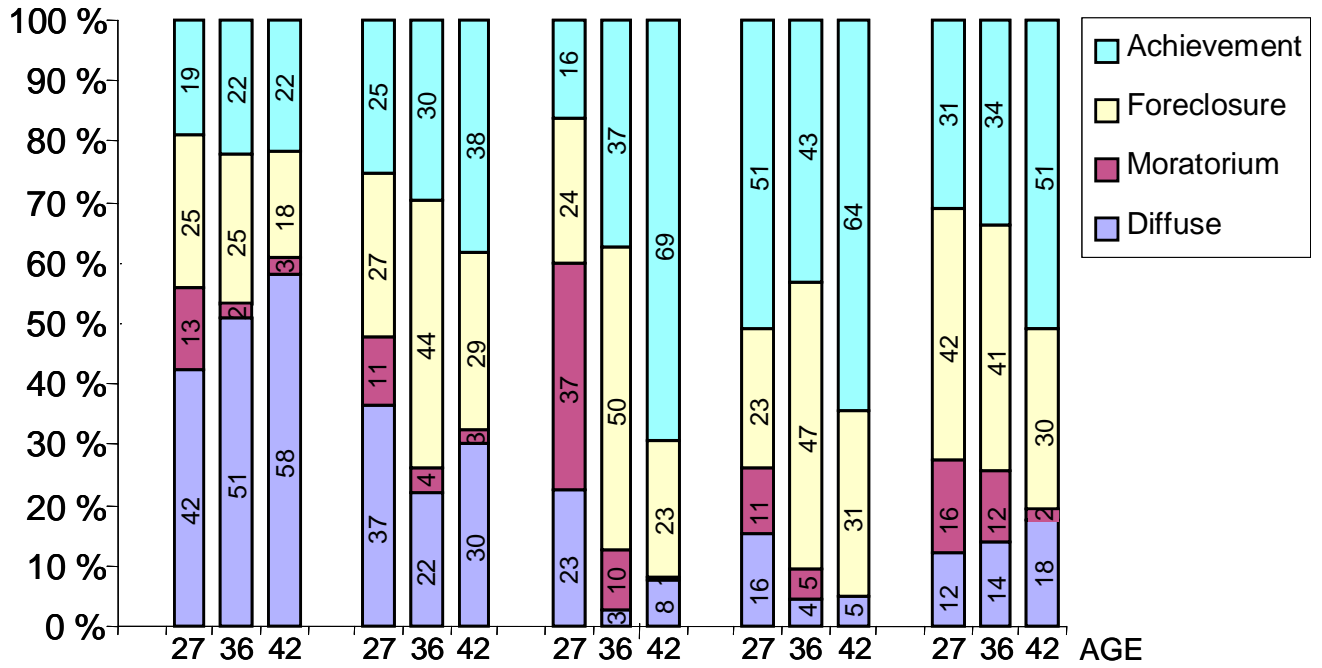
*The Distribution of Identity Status over Five Domains at Ages 27, 36, and 42 for Women and Men.*

*(For women, n=142 at age 27, n=137 at 36, and n=120 at age 42. For men, with some incidental missing values, N ranged as follows: n=148-149 at 27, n=144-146 at 36, and n=122-123 at age 42).*

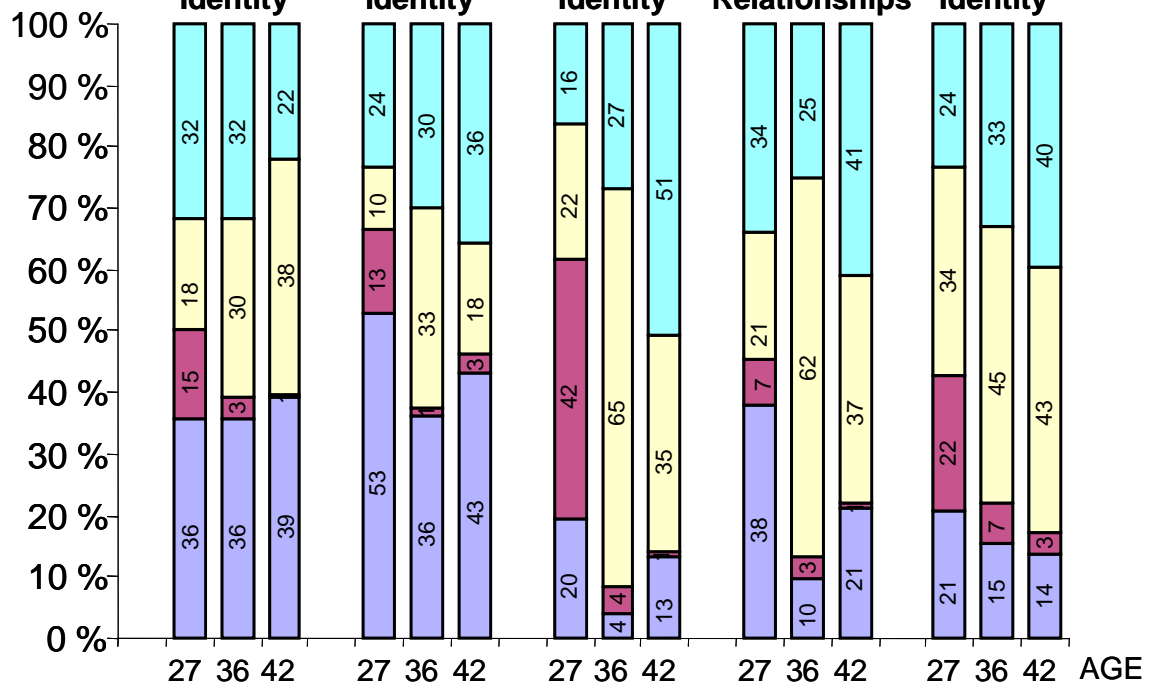
Figure 2.

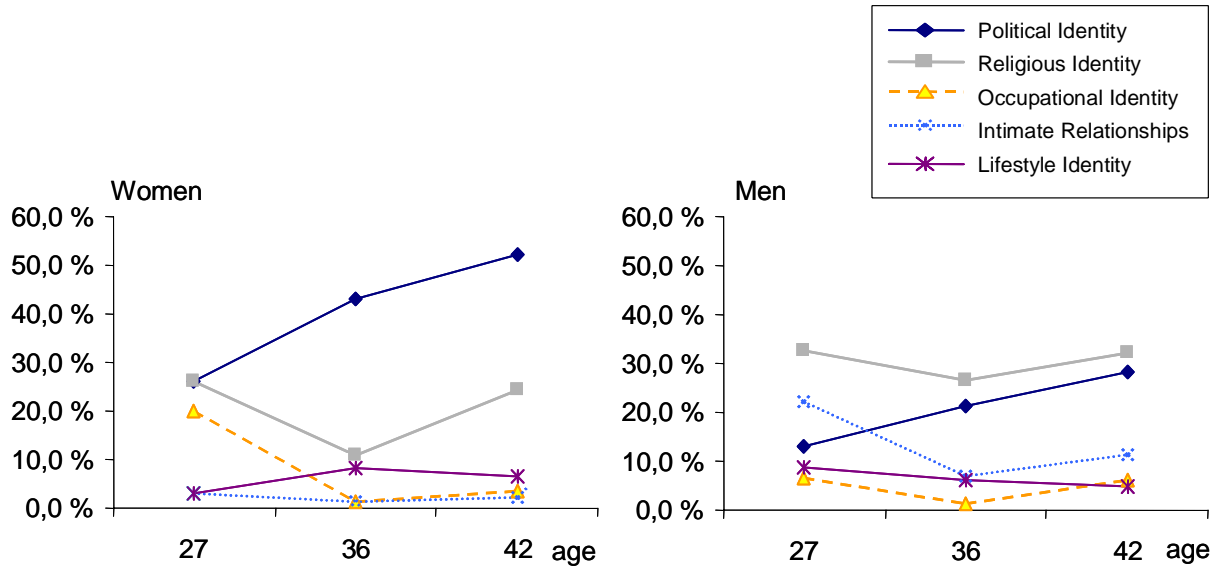
*A follow-up of the proportion of incongruently diffused identity domains for women and men with a committed overall identity at ages 27, 36, and 42. (For women, n=100; for men, n=97)*

WOMEN



MEN





Author Note

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#### KEYWORDS

Identity; status, domains, follow-up, development, salience, congruence