
Adolescent Identity Development

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Statement of Authorship

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any tertiary institute and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed:.....

Ivan Raymond

Overview of Thesis

The development of identity remains a fundamental psychosocial task of adolescence. The primary aim of this thesis is to explore the processes that underpin this developmental task, thereby providing psychological practitioners the opportunity to deliver better informed and evidence-based clinical interventions. Two separate, but inter-dependent, aspects of identity development are examined.

First, a literature review evaluates the rites of passage paradigm as a framework to understand identity development. Titled: *Adolescent identity development within contemporary Australia: The utility of the 'rites of passage' paradigm?*, a detailed contextual and anthropological analysis is provided, followed by a contemporary examination of the rites of passage process, with a special emphasis on its theoretical and applied relevance. Finally, the paper reviews the utility of the rites of passage paradigm within clinical intervention, or as an “agent of change” within adolescent development.

Second, a qualitative study, based upon Grounded Theory, is presented that examines the broad processes and outcomes of identity development for male adolescents, under Care and Protection Orders, residing in the South Australian residential care system (Families SA - Department of Families and Communities). Titled: *The development of identity for male adolescents in residential care: Processes and outcomes*, this study was designed to assist the future development of evidence-based programs and policies.

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“It takes a village to raise a child”

African Proverb

CHAPTER 1.

Literature Review

Adolescent identity development within contemporary Australia: The utility of the 'rites of passage' paradigm?

Abstract

Despite wider community appeal, there has been restricted interest within the psychological discipline to understand and utilise the “rites of passage” paradigm. In response, this paper systematically reviews the anthropological (van Gennep, 1908/1960), sociological, psychological and developmental (Eriksonian) literature to examine the utility of this paradigm within a contemporary context, and in relation to both normal and at-risk adolescent identity development. The utility of this paradigm within the context of group and individual interventions is also reviewed. Strong support is provided that the rites of passage paradigm can augment and compliment current psychological theorising and interventions. Future research and methodological directions are tabled.

Introduction

The establishment of identity remains a crucial task of adolescence (Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1968) and others (Arnett, 1998; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Irwin, 1995; Kroger & Green, 1996) have highlighted the importance of understanding this developmental process through a broad and ecologically-driven analysis. An ecological variable that has a significant mediating impact on identity development is culture. The cross-cultural literature suggests that individuals from traditional societies have a more integrated sense of family and community identity, as opposed to citizens from Western societies whose identity is more strongly linked to global factors (Arnett, 1999). There are three other distinguishing features of identity development within Western society. First, it is a journey distinguished by much ambiguity, numerous choices and individualistic signposts of success (Arnett, 2002). Second, it is increasingly being influenced by popular culture and the media (e.g., television, internet, movie stars and music) (Jensen, 2003). Third, there is no clearly defined event to mark and signpost the attainment of adulthood (Markstrom, Berman, Sabino, & Turner, 1998). Together, these factors have been linked to the increased prevalence of adolescent identity confusion within contemporary societies (Arnett, 1999, 2002; Jensen, 2003).

Considering this, across a range of allied disciplines there has been a call for a re-appreciation of traditional socialisation processes like 'rites of passage' (Delaney, 1995; Foster, 1998; Mahdi, Christopher & Meade, 1998; Scott, 1998; Venable, 1997). Despite its intuitive appeal, there has been restricted interest within the psychological discipline both to understand and employ this approach, with scientific inquiry largely left to the descriptive approaches of anthropologists, sociologists and historians. This lack of

mainstream acceptance is further fuelled by, (1) difficulties in operationalising rites of passage, (2) the increasing number of youth organisations that base their interventions upon a loosely constructed rites of passage framework (Warfield-Coppock, 1992) and (3) the phrase's colloquial expression within wider society.

In the light of this, the aim of this paper is to review the utility of the rites of passage paradigm within the context of a psychological and contemporary framework. Most importantly, it is hoped the review will foster a re-appreciation of rites of passage concepts within psychological practice and provide a foundation for future theoretical and research development. As suggested by Scott (1998), the rites of passage paradigm provides both alternative and complimentary ways to think about adolescent development. This review provides a detailed contextual and anthropological analysis, followed by a contemporary study of the rites of passage process with a special emphasis on its theoretical and applied understandings. Finally, this paper reviews the utility of the rites of passage paradigm as an “agent of change” within adolescent development, as related to its applications for psychologists, health professions, families and community.

A Contextual Basis for Rites of Passage

Cognitive Brain Development: A Process of Stimulation and Construction

In addition to physiological changes, adolescence is a period of significant psychological development as it relates to increased cognitive sophistication, self-awareness, meta-cognition and higher order thinking (Moshman, 2005). A review by Blakemore and Choudhury (2006) concluded that over the course of adolescence and extending until the mid 20's, significant physiological changes occur within the brain

structure, most strongly related to myelination and specialisation within the frontal and parietal lobes. Most importantly, Blakemore and Choudhury provide strong, but preliminary, support that adolescence represents a sensitive period for social, cognitive and executive development. Analogous to critical periods in infancy, they argue that this is an experience and stimulation dependent process. Therefore, in application, for optimal cognitive development adolescents not only need to have appropriate stimulation, but they may require support and guidance to integrate and construct these experiences until they reach their mid 20s.

Identity Development

A fundamental developmental task of adolescence is the construction of identity (Erikson, 1968). Erikson described identity as both a process and an outcome of developing an integrated resolution to the questions: ‘who am I?’, ‘where do I fit into this world?’ and ‘where am I going?’. Despite this, it is widely appreciated that identity development is a life-long process that includes understanding and integration of oneself in relation to past, present and future orientation (Erikson, 1968; Moshman, 2005). Erikson suggested that inappropriate resolution of this stage may lead to *role confusion* or an *identity crisis*, with the research suggesting that this is linked to reduced life satisfaction and wellbeing, and poorer emotional/behavioural outcomes (Adams, Abraham & Markstrom, 1987; Benson, Harris, & Rogers, 1992; Meeus, 1996; Tremblay, Saucier & Tremblay, 2004).

While identity remains a multi-faceted construct that is not readily defined (Erikson, 1968; Moshman, 2005), within the literature there is increased interest in examining the processes that underpin its development (Grotevant, 1986; 1987). In this

respect, the descriptive approach of Erikson has been significantly extended and operationalised by James Marcia (1966, 1989). Marcia's (1966) *Identity Status Model* was based upon the premise that identity formation involved the inter-dependent processes of exploration and commitment. Exploration was considered an active process of experimenting with different roles and life alternatives, while commitment was operationalised as the level of role resolution and personal investment in a chosen life alternative.

The aspects of exploration (role experimentation) and commitment underlie all contemporary models of identity development (Moshman, 2005). There is a range of contextual or ecological variables that mediate these processes (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Arnett, 1998; Irwin, 1995; Kroger & Green, 1996; Nelson, 2003). They have an important role providing opportunities for identity exploration and feedback, and they also validate identity statuses and commitments. Important variables include: adults (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996; Adamson, Hartman & Lyxell, 1999; Campbell, Adams & Dobson, 1984; Sartor & Youniss, 2002), peers (Gavin & Furman, 1989; Pugh & Hart, 1999; Tarrant, 2002), groups or crowds (Brown & Lohr, 1987), attachment patterns (Benson et al., 1992; Meeus, Oosterwegel & Vollebergh, 2002; Zimmerman & Becker-Stoll, 2002), educational institutions (Nurmi, Poole & Kalakoski, 1996), media (Lloyd, 2002), living environment (Nurmi, Poole, & Kalakoski, 1996) and culture (Arnett, 1999). Within Western societies, the adolescent peer group has a central role in both the adolescents' lives and the identity formation process (Tarrant, 2002). While the adolescent's family has an equally important role, the nature of this role is mediated by

the adolescent's age and the quality of the child-parent relationship (Campbell et al., 1984; Gavin & Furman, 1989; Marcia, 1989; Meeus, Iedema, Maassen & Engels, 2005).

Globalisation and Contemporary Identity Development

Jeffrey Arnett (2002) argues that within Western societies identity development cannot be understood outside a framework acknowledging the economic and social processes of globalisation. Arnett (2000, 2002) suggests that whereas in pre-industrial societies identity and personal meaning were largely obtained through the local community (including culture and family), in contemporary societies many young people are socialised to seek a 'global identity' based on the secular values of materialism, independence and choices. Others extend this secular ideology to include a preoccupation with self-interest and immediate-gratification, and dislocation of spiritual and existential meaning (Musschenga, 2000; Scott, 1998). Jensen (2003) suggests that the process of identity development within contemporary societies is increasingly being influenced by popular culture, media and external agents (e.g., television, internet, movie stars and music), or what Jensen labels a process of 'virtual reality', as opposed to it being a community and experientially-based process that is characteristic of traditional societies. Within Western societies, adolescents receive minimal levels of adult contact and support outside their immediate family (Adamson et al., 1999; Scales et al., 2001). Arnett (2002) and other writers have suggested that globalisation may impact on identity development in the following ways:

- (1) Increased identity confusion. Globalisation results in increased levels of identity confusion as adolescents become stuck between an individual and

global cultural identity (Arnett, 2002) and have to negotiate the large number of choices on offer (Markstrom et al., 1998).

- (2) Extended identity exploration. Globalisation results in the identity exploration process extending beyond adolescence and into the stage which Arnett (2002) defines as *emerging adulthood* (18-25 years of age). Arnett (1998, 2000, 2002) notes that societies which have high levels of economic development allow young people to stay out of the workforce and devote time for self-development, thereby prolonging their search for identity.
- (3) Extended attainment of adult identity status. Arnett and Taber (1994) note that the attainment of adult identity status in Western societies is defined by individualism, material independence, and the acceptance of self-responsibility, as opposed to allocated roles (e.g., marriage, parenthood) within traditional societies. As many adolescents within Western societies remain economically dependent on their parents until their early 20s (Irwin, 1995), the resultant net effect is an extended period before the attainment of full adult status.
- (4) Identity self-selection. Arnett (2002) suggests that through a process of increased identity confusion, many adolescents are isolating themselves from the mainstream culture and finding meaning within self-selected groups (e.g., joining fundamentalist or secular organisations).
- (5) Bicultural identity development. In cases where the local culture retains a strong influence, Arnett (2002) suggests that adolescents may develop

both a local/cultural and global identity. Many Indigenous Australians experience identity confusion as they attempt to integrate these competing identity states (Beresford & Omaji, 1996; Dudgeon, 2000; Groome, 1995; Wilfred, 2000).

Summary of Contextual Background

Identity formation is a central developmental task of adolescence. Considering the dynamic and experience-dependent nature of adolescent neural nomenclature, one may postulate that aspects of identity are ‘hardwired’ during this sensitive period. In support of this assertion, both identity and neural development are experience-dependent or exploration-dependent processes. Therefore, there is much intuitive appeal for the notion that adolescents who are supported by their parents and who have the opportunity to explore and construct their identity statuses/roles, will not only experience less identity confusion but that this may be hardwired at this time. However, in contrast, identity development within Western societies, like Australia, is characterised by increasing ambiguity, confusion (or moratorium), role exploration and an extended attainment of adult status. Within this context adolescent identity development is increasingly being mediated by the media (‘virtual reality’), popular culture and peer groups, as opposed to it being a family, community and experientially driven process.

Considering these points, there is much intuitive appeal for interventions that can (1) guide and support pathways of optimal identity exploration, (2) guide the transition to adulthood, and (3) galvanise both family and community resources within this process. Arnett (2002) notes that in some communities there has been a renewed interest in

reviving cultural and spiritual practices to promote identity development and community connectedness. This has also extended to an increased interest within the allied health literature to utilise rites of passage to foster adolescent development and wellbeing (Delaney, 1995; Foster, 1998; Mahdi et al., 1998; Scott, 1998; Venable, 1997).

What are ‘Rites of Passage’?

The inability to operationalise adequately, or clearly define, the rites of passage process, has led to the paradigm’s haphazard application (Warfield-Coppock, 1992), and arguably, to its colloquial expression within wider society. Considering this, this paper reviews the anthropological, theoretical and contemporary understandings of the rites of passage process as a means to develop an operational definition that is inclusive of its historical roots and contemporary applications.

Anthropological Overview

Van Gennep’s Tripartite Model

The French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1908/1960), in his book *Les Rites de Passage*, was the first person to describe systematically rites of passage. Van Gennep noted that in a large number of pre-industrial societies, important rituals (rites) or ceremonial events, frequently accompanied changes in social conditions or identity, for instance: birth, death, manhood, womanhood and ordination. He reported that these rites evoked identity change through a process of *separation*, *transition* and *incorporation*. Van Gennep noted that rites of passage are distinguished by three factors; first, they must be a publicly displayed ritual; second, their importance and relevance must be accepted within the community or social hierarchy; and third, any change in identity state must be

distinct from the former state and be recognised as such by both the individual and the community.

Van Gennep's (1908/1960) tripartite model was extended by Victor Turner (1969) who added the concept of *communitas*, or coming together of people, for the *transition* stage. Further extensions of the model have included additional stages (or sub-stages) (e.g., Dunham, Kidwell & Wilson, 1986) and greater acknowledgement of cultural factors (e.g., Brookins, 1996). Critics of van Gennep's model have pointed out that rites of passage are not evident in every pre-industrial society (Schlegel & Barry, 1980), and that both cross-cultural (Munroe, Munroe, & Whiting, 1981) and gender-related differences cannot be adequately explained (Schlegel & Barry, 1980). Despite this, van Gennep's work continues to be extensively cited within the literature and remains a useful descriptive model.

Rites of Passage as a Transition to Adulthood

Many traditional societies in Africa, Oceania and the America's, have continued to celebrate rites of passage to mark both the transition to adulthood (Delaney, 1995; Munroe et al., 1981) and gender status (Schlegel & Barry, 1980). These rites of passage, or initiations, were characterised by significant gender differences in the conduct, length and symbolic meaning attached to them (Nicholson, 2004). In general, female initiations were largely initiated at the point of menarche and distinguished by isolation and role socialisation. In contrast, male rituals were characterised by tests of strength, courage and pain that were designed to socialise masculinity, prowess and bravery (Nicholson, 2004). For both males and females, many of the rituals (e.g., circumcision, nose-bleeding, rapes

and bodily mutilation) were regarded as barbaric and inhumane by Western cultural standards.

Within Australia, initiation was, and in many places continues to be, an important part of Aboriginal society to signify the transition to adulthood. It represents a symbolic, ceremonial and physical journey that provides initiates access to Aboriginal spirituality and fosters both personal responsibility and community participation (Maddern, 1990). In some initiations hallucinogens are used to alter consciousness, increase initiate suggestibility, and to assist in the process of enculturation of religious, secular and gender values (Grob & de Rios, 1992). While ceremonies and rituals remain fundamental to many Aboriginal communities, the frequency of the practices has decreased, and many have been transformed in response to socio-cultural influences (Dussart, 2004). Despite this, the importance of cultural identity development remains central to all Indigenous Australians (Beresford & Omaji, 1996; Dudgeon, 2000; Groome, 1995; Wilfred, 2000).

Elements of the Rites of Passage Process

There are a number of common elements that underpin the rites of passage process. The following review is based upon the frameworks provided by Sanyika (1998) and Sheppard (2004).

1. Elders. The elders conducted the rituals, acted as role models (or surrogate parents) and taught and guided the initiates. They were also the guardians of the group's beliefs and wisdom, and their experience and skill were held in high regard (Majors & Dewar, 2002).

2. Separation process. In this phase the initiate was removed from an environment that either reinforced or upheld their former identity. In some tribal societies girls were taken to the *menstrual hut* and boys were taken into the forest (Christopher, 1998). The separation was a process that occurred on a physical and/or symbolic level (Fasick, 1988; Tacey, 1995).
3. Sacred place. The rite of passage process was conducted in a place of spiritual or cultural significance, for instance a cave, hut, temple, monastery or ashram.
4. Symbolic death. This signified the completion of one stage of life in preparation for the next stage, with the death occurring on a psychical level.
5. Trials and tribulations. Challenging ordeals were often used to breakdown the initiate's ego and to help him/her learn new information and acquire a new identity. This often included tests of challenge, risk, courage or long periods of isolation.
6. Revelation. This related to the existential or spiritual teachings, universal wisdoms and skills taught to the initiates to socialise appropriate gender or community roles. It was a learning process that occurred both experientially and symbolically (Scott, 1998).
7. Culturally specific rituals and ceremonies. Ceremonial rituals (e.g., traditional dress, food, songs and music) were used to formalise, celebrate and augment the entire process.
8. Resurrection and rebirth. The establishment of a new community status (e.g., adult) was analogous to a birth process, where identity status was

consolidated on a physical, mental and transpersonal level (Grof, 1998; Meade, 1998).

9. Reincorporation into the community. The rite of passage was complete when the initiate was welcomed back into the community and the new identity status (e.g., adulthood) was validated through the community's actions.

Rites of Passage in Contemporary Society

Macro-rites and Micro-rites

Anthropological representations of rites of passage have lost relevance within contemporary societies. This decline has mirrored increased economic and technical development, globalisation, increased gender equality and socio-cultural changes that have outlawed barbaric initiation practices (Arnett, 1998, 2002; van Gennep, 1908/1960). Despite this, recent media reports suggest that such practices (e.g., clitoridectomy or female circumcision) may still occur within some contemporary societies. In contrast to pre-industrial societies where rites of passage were both systematically and universally conducted, today the phrase is applied mainly to a range of pre-existing or socially constructed practices (e.g., high school graduation) (Irwin, 1995).

Within contemporary society rites of passage can be distinguished on two levels (Dunham et al., 1986). First, *macro-rites* are the grand and formal ceremonial rituals that occur once or twice within a lifetime and mark the most significant transitions to adult identity. In contrast, Dunham et al. apply the label *micro-rites* to rituals that are “less dramatic, more frequent, less formal, and less public” that support identity formation and

role status within certain transitions to adulthood (p. 150). This distinction is worth highlighting because contemporary society has a large number of micro-rites but few, if any, macro-rites to signify the transition to adulthood. As suggested by Arnett (2003), in contemporary society “there is no rite or event that signifies unambiguously that a young person has attained an adult status” (p. 71).

Micro-rites exist within a number of different guises. For instance religions mark changes in identity status in different ways; Buddhists by initiation (Kornfield, 1998), Christians by confirmation (Davies, 1994) and Mormons by mission service (Nelson, 2003). All of these practices are supportive of van Gennep’s (1908/1960) tripartite model. To illustrate, the Christian confirmation process involves a separation from childhood roles (e.g., the initiate no longer attends Sunday school), a period of religious instruction (e.g., confirmation classes) and then re-incorporation through a symbolic ceremony that signifies the change in status (e.g., Communion is taken for the first time).

Rites of passage have been explicitly linked to a range of school processes or transitions, including: high school graduation (Fasick, 1988; Hayes, 1981), transition between primary and high school (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005) and significant school-based projects (Larson, 1988). Conversely, Delaney (1995), who takes a purist view, argues that schools’ unwillingness to promote existential- or morality-based curricula or foster long-term relationships with adult figures, does not befit school graduation as a rite of passage process. In summary, it could be argued that when high school graduation is followed by full-time work and adult responsibilities it represents a significant rite of passage (e.g. macro-rite). However, as exemplified within contemporary society, high

school graduation is often followed by further education and continued dependence, and as such the process represents a less important marker to adulthood (e.g., micro-rite).

Rites of passage may occur in the context of sporting groups (e.g., transition from junior to senior status), university and other fraternities, and a number of work organisations (Meade, 1998). To illustrate, army recruits undergo a period of separation and removal of old identity (e.g., hair shaved off), a period of intensive training, education and tests, and finally, a period of re-incorporation through a graduation ceremony. Similarly, Strang (2001) reviewed the psychosocial development of the male stockman in northern Australia. She commented that new stockman, through a rite of passage socialisation process, are acculturated to develop an identity that discourages sensitivity and tenderness and promotes racist and denigrating value systems. Strang notes that this process includes the use of costumes (boots, hats and leathers), rituals (humiliating the initiates and constant swearing) and various tests (e.g., rodeo) as the proving ground.

There are a diverse number of socially constructed micro-rites within contemporary society, including obtaining a driving licence, independent living, and attaining the age when the individual has the right to sexual consent, to drink alcohol, to vote, and to perform jury service (Dorr, 1998; Irwin, 1995; Sheppard, 2004). Probably the most important, and the rite most celebrated, is marriage. Other events or activities that have been linked to the rites of passage process include: the 'gap year' - travelling overseas after school (Chatzky, 2005; Tacey, 1995), overseas group expeditions (Beames, 2004), providing service to youth or volunteer organisations and apprenticeships (Christopher, 1998; Markstrom et al., 1998).

'Pseudo' Rites of Passage

Risk-taking. A range of commentators argue that the socially constructed nature of rites of passage also extends to a range of at-risk or socially undesirable behaviours (Anderson, 1998; Meade, 1998; Tacey, 1995), or what Grof (1998) labels as adolescents striving to create their own “pseudo rites of passage”. In other words, adolescent at-risk behaviour arises as adolescents strive to manage and control this ambiguous transition to adult identity status (Steinberg, 1987). Rites of passage have a developmental function of supporting the adolescent separate from a previous identity, explore alternatives and assume a new identity (Hurrelmann & Raithel, 2005).

Whereas within traditional societies there existed a clear identity outcome (that is, adult status) which was attained under the guidance of adults (or elders), in contemporary societies it is mainly peers who guide the process (Pugh & Hart, 1999; Tarrant, 2002), with the outcome (self-responsibility) being unclear and ambiguous (Arnett, 1999). Problems within this process can therefore arise on two levels; first, peers themselves are in a process of identity exploration; and second, the process relies heavily on the peer group to promote pro-social, cultural, moral and spiritual values.

Within a number of Western societies, the early and excessive consumption of alcohol represents a rite of passage process within some social groups (Merten, 2005; Sande, 2002). Drug use has a similar function, notably as a transcendental experience that widens the boundaries of the self, and it is analogous to a traditional initiation process (Eckert, 1998; Grob & De Rios, 1992; Tacey, 1995). There are also gender-specific manifestations of the risk-taking process. For instance, Nicholson (2004) notes that while boys will engage in externalising high-risk behaviour, which often involves displays of

bravery in the presence of an audience (e.g. jumping off a roof), girls are likely to engage in more internalising behaviour such as self-harming (e.g., cutting and scratching). Nicholson views this cutting as an adaptive rite of passage response that allows girls to “explore their autonomy, to discover their own boundaries and to emotionally grow into independent adults” (p. 27). Dorr (1998) suggests that adolescent females may seek either dependent relationships or early motherhood as a means to explore and fulfil their identity needs at this time. Rites of passage have also been linked to adolescents seeking out and exploring occultism, shamans, gurus, cults, healers, astrology and fundamentalist religions as a means to undertake an initiatory experience and develop a coherent sense of existential identity (Tacey, 1995).

Gang initiation. Papachristos (1998) and others (Anderson, 1998; Sanyika, 1998; Tacey, 1995) suggest that gangs construct their induction process as a rite of passage, with this occurring more readily within marginalised groups (Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Papachristos notes that new initiates are separated from their previous roles by older peers (or elders) who provide instruction and reinforce the group identity. Initiation into the group status may occur through the conduct of a criminal or symbolic act (e.g., murder of a rival gang member). Sullwold (1998) makes analogous links between this initiatory outcome and initiations within traditional societies (e.g., African Masai initiate killing a lion).

Offending behaviour. A number of sociological commentators have drawn links between criminal activity and rites of passage (Dawes, 2002; White, 1990), most notably for Indigenous male youths (White, 1990). For instance, the “joyriding culture may be seen as one area where Indigenous youth can construct their identity through participation

with their peers and obtain a sense of belonging through a perception of group solidarity” (Dawes, 2002, p. 207). However, while both youth offending and incarceration is strongly linked to Indigenous identity development (Beresford & Omaji, 1996; Ogilvie & van Zyl, 2001), some commentators have questioned its wholesale association with the rites of passage process (Ogilvie, 1996; Ogilvie & van Zyl, 2001). Ogilvie and van Zyl dispute the populist belief that incarceration is a rite of passage for Indigenous youths living within remote Australian communities, but instead suggest that it represents just “another venue for the construction of identity” (p. 3).

Empirical Support for ‘Pseudo Rites of Passage’

While there is no causal support for the relationship between rites of passage and at-risk behaviour, there are increasing levels of correlational support for this relationship. Nelson (2003) reviewed the rites of passage process for Mormon youths and found a correlational link between group membership and reduced risks of anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol use, sexual intercourse and cohabitation. In addition, in a two-year American ethnographic study, Merten (2005) found a link between female at-risk behaviour (drinking, smoking and decreased academic performance) and the transition from primary school to high school. Merten suggested that these “behaviours often represented ritual actions that helped girls make their way through the ambiguous transitions to junior high and teenhood” (p. 143). In other words, it signified the completion of the previous identity state as ‘compliant children’. Finally, in a review of cross-cultural research, Arnett (2003) found that traditional societies had a lower

prevalence of at-risk behaviour during adolescence which he linked to the role of community-based socialisation processes.

Rites of Passage in a Contemporary Context: Summary

Within contemporary societies, socially constructed rites of passages have largely replaced the traditional processes that were formalised and community-based. Today there are few, if any, macro-rites, with a large number of micro-rites providing important signposts to mark the identity transition from childhood to adulthood. All adolescents will experience rites of passage, whether they are delivered and validated by their community, family, school or within their peer group, or represent socially desirable or un-desirable rites. However, the question is posed, what happens to adolescents who are unable to access socially desirable rites, for instance completing high school, obtaining a job, or purchasing a car? For these young people the quest for identity development remains equally important, but in this case they appear to be at higher risk of exploring socially undesirable rites. There is an identified need to provide alternative rites of passage experiences (e.g., interventions) for this cohort (Markstrom et al., 1998).

Rites of Passage: Theoretical Underpinnings

Anthropological Models

The anthropological literature has made the greatest theoretical contribution to the rites of passage process, and it has been strongly influenced by sociological, ethological and psychodynamic approaches (Markstrom et al., 1998). This paper reviews two dominant anthropological theories (the psychogenic- and sociogenic-needs hypotheses)

which help explain why rites of passage occur within traditional societies (Munroe et al., 1981).

The sociogenic-needs perspective suggests that rites of passage are central to maintaining social structure and communal responsibilities (Munroe et al., 1981; van Gennep, 1908/1960). Rites ensure that there is a consistent presentation of adult identity, which in turn leads to a stable society in general (Dunham et al., 1986). In short, the role of rites is to link “the individual to the group and the group to the individual” (Stevens, 1981, p. 142), with this also including linkages to family, community and sacredness (Somé, 1998). Traditional rites of passage had an important socialising role in fostering communal discipline, group faith, spirituality and segregation of gender roles. It has also been argued that rites of passage developed more strongly in communities that promoted inequality within gender power relations (Schlegel & Barry, 1980). The maintenance of the group’s power is founded upon loyalty, and initiation rites both socialise and uphold group discipline.

The psychogenic-needs hypothesis suggests that rites of passage promote identity development (Frankel, 1998), and fulfil archetypal or psychodynamic needs (Sanyika, 1998; Meade, 1998; Stevens, 1981). For instance, in Margaret Mead’s (1949) ‘womb-envy’ hypothesis, she suggested that male initiation (e.g., circumcision) was based upon an intrapsychic need for men to develop a passage to manhood, noting that women have a number of biological and social rites that signified this transition (e.g., virginity, menarche, child bearing and menopause). This hypothesis also suggests that male rites of passage are an intrapsychic process to sever the mother-child attachment, and in doing so transfer the attachment from the mother, or feminine qualities, to masculine ideology

and spirituality (Herdt, 1990; Munroe et al., 1981; Stevens, 1981; Whiting, 1990). In a review of the cross-cultural literature, Munroe et al. (1981) found strong support for both sociogenic and psychogenic approaches in explaining the manifestation and prevalence of sex-role initiations in men.

Contemporary Developmental Models

The anthropological review has highlighted a number of implicit links between rites of passage and developmental models of identity formation. For instance, the separation-individuation hypothesis of adolescent identity development (Blos, 1967) suggests that through the separation or reconfiguration of the parent-adolescent relationship, the child is able to develop autonomously and construct new identity commitments (Kroger & Haslett, 1988; Meeus, Iedema, Maassen & Engels, 2005). Considering that ‘separation’ is common to both the developmental and anthropological models, initial descriptive support is provided for this line of enquiry.

While a number of commentators have advocated a developmental understanding of rites of passage, apart from isolated models (Brookins, 1996; Dunham et al., 1986; Markstrom, et al., 1998) and case studies (Markstrom & Iborra, 2003), the adolescent literature contains few studies that have examined this relationship (Dunham et al., 1986). It is widely acknowledged that van Gennep’s (1908/1960) tripartite model provides a valuable organising scheme, but has limited utility in developing advanced models or empirical work (Dunham et al., 1986).

The first serious attempt to combine an anthropological understanding of rites of passage within a developmental framework was made by Dunham et al. (1986).

Advocating a multi-dimensional theoretical framework based on cultural anthropology, developmental theory, psychology, sociology and theology, the authors extended van Genep's (1908/1960) tripartite model to 14 individual stages. Titled the *Ritual Process Paradigm (RPP)*, their intention was to increase the operationalisability of individual stages of the rites of passage process as a means of generating further research and interest in the topic. An overview of the model is reproduced in Table 1.

While Dunham et al.'s (1986) *Ritual Process Paradigm (RPP)* is descriptively sound, its eclectic theoretical base restricts the ability of single disciplines (e.g., psychology) to validate the model. The authors also acknowledge that the model may be incomplete and that a number of concepts lack empirical validity. In relation to this, Dunham et al.'s conceptualisations of rites of passage outcomes remain vague, which limits its operationalisability. This is illustrated as follows:

Our perspective is that the rite of passage only nominally changes a role. More precisely it is a recognition of an expansion of role boundaries to encompass the components of the next role. We do not separate from the old role, rather we are permitted to exceed the boundaries of the old role and operate within the sphere of the new role. (Dunham et al., 1986, p. 148)

Table 1.
Ritual Process Paradigm. Reproduced from Table 1, Dunham et al. (1986, p. 146)

	Step	Generic Name	Summary of Concept
I Preparation	1	Old support group	It “consists of the significant others – models, sponsors, supervisors, disciplinarians, teachers, who have overseen the individual during the current developmental stage.” (p. 145)
	2	Old identity	It “is the old role of self from which the rite of passage is to separate the individual.” (p. 145)
	3	Old identity completion	It “is taken to be the set of signs of readiness that serve as cues for the rite of passage.” (p. 145)
II Separation	4	New environmental demands	They “are the collective, intuitively guarded, often subtle, social cues that usher the individual out of the security of the old role and into liminality.” (p. 147)
	5	Liminality	It “is the marginal or uncertain status of the individual who is being forced out of an old identity but has not been accepted into a new one.” (p. 147)
	6	Activation	It refers “to the mobilization of the individual’s adaptive capacity. It is experienced by the individual, however, as anxiety, or even outright fear.” (p. 147)
	7	Agony	It “refers to the experience of helplessness, depression, inner crisis, and self-doubt at a developmental passage.” (p. 147)
III Transition	8	Numinosity	It “is awe, a waiting, an attitude of respectful, alert expectancy, an openness to one’s fate.” (p. 147)
	9	Accommodation	It “refers to the cognitive changes or closure which signals the beginning of the incorporation of the new role.” (p. 147)
	10	Ecstasy	“Experientially it is relief of anxiety and fear and the onset of joy. The individual feels safe having been saved from liminality.” (p. 148)
IV Reincorporation	11	Transcendence	It “occurs when the individual and the community perceive that the old identity has been abandoned and the new identity entered.” (p. 148)
	12	New identity	It “is the new role or self to which the individual is advanced in a rites of passage.” (p. 148)
	13	New support group	It “is the realignment of community members who are appropriate to guide the individual in the exploration and mastery of the new role.” (p. 148)
	14	Identity reinforcement	“the social reinforcers, including approval, disapproval, and appropriate ignoring, will be provided principally by the new support group.” (p. 150)

Despite the noted shortfalls, the RPP represents an impressive attempt to combine anthropological concepts within an eclectic developmental framework. Markstrom and Iborra (2003) applied the RPP framework to conduct a case-study analysis of identity transitions of female native Americans completing a ‘coming-of-age ceremony’, and concluded that the model was conceptually sound. The RPP has been further extended by Brookins (1996) to incorporate a range of culturally relevant constructs for African American rites of passage programs.

Eriksonian Developmental Theory and Rites of Passage

In relation to psychology, the most robust and conceptually sound model of the rites of passage process was developed by Markstrom et al. (1998). Markstrom et al. extensively reviewed and compared the anthropological (rites of passage) and the Eriksonian (psychosocial) concepts of adolescent transitions. They provided compelling support for the wholesale similarities of both models upholding the importance of *transition* and *reincorporation*. For instance, Erikson (1964) describes the successful resolution of a psychosocial crisis as resulting in the transition and incorporation into a new identity status.

Central to Markstrom et al’s (1998) model are Erikson’s (1985) *ego virtues* or *ego strengths*. Erikson conceptualised ego virtues as the resultant state of a successful completion of a psychosocial stage of development. During adolescence a successful resolution of the stage described as ‘identity versus identity confusion’ would manifest in the ego virtue of *fidelity*, which Erikson stated must be achieved before subsequent psychosocial development (e.g., intimacy) can occur. Markstrom et al. characterise

fidelity as the achievement of loyalty and commitment, “being true to themselves, honest in their beliefs, and loyal to the people important to them.” (p. 345). The counterpart of fidelity is *role repudiation*, where the individual does not take up acceptable societal roles, and this leads to a lack of purpose and meaning in life (Erikson, 1985). Markstrom et al. suggest that the ego-strength of fidelity marks a life-stage transition and represents a ‘rite of passage’ in its own right. Erikson (1985) suggested that the development of fidelity would have significant benefits for both individual and environment, and this has striking similarities to the anthropological conception of rites of passage as fulfilling both psychogenic and sociogenic needs (Markstrom et al., 1998).

The strength of Markstrom et al.’s (1998) model lies in its strong theoretical basis, its ability to operationalise outcomes and the potential for these outcomes to be empirically measured (e.g., fidelity). While this model would appear to offer some utility, it is worth emphasising that the identity literature has been strongly influenced by Marcia’s (1966) concepts of exploration and commitment, and this remains the most well-developed and validated area of identity research.

Theoretical Summary and Future Directions

Both the anthropological and developmental perspectives on the rites of passage process have highlighted the inter-connectedness of individual and socio-cultural environments. While van Gennep’s (1908/1960) tripartite model has been extended by others (e.g., Dunham et al., 1986), apart from isolated examples (Markstrom et al., 1998), the operationalisability of such models is questioned. The noted similarities between identity development (Eriksonian) and anthropological concepts of rites of passage

warrant further review and attention within the psychological literature. In particular, Marcia's (1966, 1989) *Ego Identity Status Model*, which has extensively operationalised a number of Eriksonian concepts and remains a well-validated area of research, represents an area of particular interest (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens & Beyers, 2006; Moshman, 2005). There is an identified need for the understanding of the rites of passage process to move beyond descriptive understanding and case-study evaluation to prescriptive approaches that permit operationalisability and empirical validation.

Rites of Passage: Operational Definition

The ability to operationalise rites of passage has remained problematic. The following definition, developed by the author, is presented as a starting point and is inclusive of the previous anthropological, contemporary and theoretical review.

A 'rite of passage' is any process by which an individual *undertakes* an *experience* that is culturally and symbolically relevant to both themselves and their *identified community*, and through the completion of this experience it transforms how they identify themselves within their community, and how their community subsequently identifies them.

There are a number of important aspects to this definition. The term *experience* refers to any event, either internal (e.g., menarche) or external (e.g., youth program) to the individual. *Community* may refer to peers, adults, sporting group, religious organisation or family which is important to the individual. This definition also indicates that the outcomes associated with rites of passage are a transformation in identity that is both validated and reciprocated by the individual and the community.

Rites of Passage as Agents of Change

This paper reviews rites of passage interventions in respect to three domains: group programs, individual interventions, and family-community settings.

Group Programs

An examination of the literature indicates that rites of passage have been attached to a wide range of therapeutic interventions and presenting problems, often without well-founded clinical basis. It has led Warfield–Coppock (1992) to pose the question: “has the rite of passage become a band-aid approach available to anyone who can acquire the resources for a youth program?” (p. 480-481). A number of rites of passage case studies can be found within the literature (for review see Mahdi et al., 1998).

Within Australia, there are no documented rites of passage programs being delivered. Internationally, the majority of rites of passage programs have been developed within America (Eckert, 1998) and have largely focused on culturally-delivered learning objectives (e.g., Burton & Rogers, 1998; Gavazzi, Alford & McKenry, 1996; Harvey & Rauch, 1997; Majors & Dewar, 2002; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). A review of the literature suggests that rites of passage programs are notably heterogeneous, differing on a number of levels. For instance, contemporary programs include a diverse range of program elements ranging from fasting and self-reflection (Foster, 1998) to adventure skills such as abseiling and rock climbing (Fine, 1997; May, 1996; Oldfield, 1998; Venable, 1997). Van Gennep’s (1908/1960) tripartite model has also been applied adjunctively to a wide range of complementary programs, including camps (Thompson, Battersby & Lee, 1998), school and university curricula (Dror & Johnson, 1998; Fine,

1997; Kessler, 1998), experiential, adventure or wilderness activities (Fine, 1997; May, 1996; Oldfield, 1998 Venable, 1997) and creative arts programs (Stokrocki, 1997). Rites of passage interventions have been applied to diverse populations including: youth-at-risk (Burton & Rogers, 1998), foster care youth transitioning to independent living (Gavazzi et al., 1996) and adolescents undergoing religious instruction (Thompson et al., 1998; Venable 1997).

Program outcomes and evaluation. The heterogeneous nature of rites of passage programs has led to a range of problems related to standardisation, replication and evaluation (Gavazzi et al., 1996; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). Apart from isolated examples (Markstrom & Iborra, 2003), the majority of interventions are based on a loosely developed or descriptive theoretical position (e.g., van Gennep's, 1908/1960 tripartite model) (Warfield-Coppock, 1992), with purported program outcomes lacking operationalisability. This led one commentator to suggest that rites of passage outcomes "cannot be measured scientifically" (Oldfield, 1998, p. 148).

A small number of rites of passage programs provide descriptive or anecdotal evidence for their program's effectiveness, for instance, improved ethnic and spiritual identity, and self-perception (e.g., Gavazzi et al., 1996; Venable, 1997). Universally, however, evaluation of rites of passage programs lack methodological rigor (Brookins, 1996; Gavazzi et al., 1996) and as such, the empirical validity of such programs remains unknown at this stage. It is widely accepted, however, that wholesale changes in identity cannot be achieved through a rites of passage process, nor are such interventions a "panacea for current community problems" (Brookins, 1996, p. 410). It is therefore

suggested that rites of passage programs should move beyond intuitive appeal and that future evaluation should be guided by the:

- Development of a theoretical framework that links both rites of passage program processes and outcomes.
- Development of operationalisable program outcomes.
- Use of standardised and validated measures.
- Undertaking of methodologically robust evaluation processes (e.g., pretest-posttest control group design).
- Use of both qualitative and quantitative techniques that evaluate both outcomes and processes.

Individual Interventions

Within adolescent psychology, increasing importance is being placed on ecologically-centred therapeutic practices (Hurrelmann & Raithal, 2005), most notably the achievement of spiritual, community and family connectedness (Biddulph, 1995; Garbarino, 2000). Despite this, the application of rites of passage processes is given limited, if any, attention within the clinical therapy literature. As noted by this review, there is strong, but preliminary support that the rites of passage paradigm can make a significant contribution to understanding adolescent development, and as such would appear to have an adjunctive role in delivering evidence-based clinical practice. To illustrate, Steve Biddulph (1995) in his book *Manhood*, examines the transition to manhood and suggests that this can be supported through a holistic process that includes a number of rites of passage elements, including outdoor experiences, nature, spiritual

attunement, adolescent-adult connectedness, and support for the adolescent search for their ‘wild spirit’.

In summary, there is currently no evidence to support the use of individually-delivered and stand-alone interventions based on a rites of passage framework. Despite this, the review provides strong support for the view that rites of passage have important roles in adolescent development, and as such the re-appreciation of this within both psychological assessment and intervention has the potential to significantly augment current therapeutic practice and outcomes.

Families and Communities

It is common for families to seek information from psychologists and other professionals regarding the rites of passage process, and specifically how they can support this process in their adolescent’s development. The following summary is designed to guide the content of such psycho-education:

1. Encourage the completion of rites. Adolescents should be both encouraged and supported to complete pro-social rites of passage, for instance, completing high school, obtaining a drivers licence and engaging in paid employment (for review see Wall & Ferguson, 1998). This also extends to supporting adolescents to remain engaged with institutions that include pro-social rites of passage programs (e.g., sporting groups, Scouts and religious institutions) (Sheppard, 2002).

2. Celebrate and validate the rites. Families and communities should celebrate their adolescents' achievement of rites, and in doing so, validate them as a markers indicating positive growth and closer alignment to adult status (Dunham et al., 1986). For instance, this may include celebrating the onset of menarche with a presentation of flowers (Kilmer, 1998; Sullwold, 1998), or significant adult figures providing a blessing that acknowledges and accepts the full adult status of their child (Bjornsen, 2000).

3. Encouraging exploration. Rites of passage are explicitly linked to the process of identity exploration. Adolescents should be encouraged and supported to explore pro-social individual, peer, vocational and community roles (Marcia, 1989). These may include the undertaking of a joint overseas holiday (Higgins, 1998), encouraging extracurricular activities (Eccles, Barber, Stone & Hunt, 2003) or supporting overseas travel (Chatzky, 2005). Interestingly, Delaney (1995) suggests that an increasing body of youth literature bases its storyline on a rite of passage paradigm (e.g., separation, transition and reincorporation). The encouragement of such reading may be a further means of supporting this exploration process.

4. Encouraging community participation. Rites of passage represent an ecologically-driven process based within the community (Somé, 1998).

Adolescents should be encouraged to engage with the community. Additionally they should have access to adults or institutions that provide structured support during the process of separating from family roles, during exploration and training, and during reintegration into the community. This may include vocational pathways (e.g., military service), volunteering and apprenticeships (Dunham et al., 1986; Markstrom et al., 1998). Mentoring, which is a form of positive structured guidance and exploration (Philip & Hendry, 1996), may also have an important role in supporting the rites of passage process (Markstrom et al., 1998).

Summary

Initiation isn't a boy scout adventure – or a one-off eco-tourism buzz! (Though that could be a good start!) It's a whole education - taking decades. (Biddulph, 1995, p. 210).

Rites of passage are a set of socially constructed experiences that, through their undertaking and completion, manifest in incremental transformations in identity. This developmental process is driven, shaped and validated by communities, families, mentors, adults and peers. Within contemporary society, there is a wide range of both static (e.g., voting rights) and dynamic (e.g., drug use) experiences that can be described within the context of a rites of passage paradigm. Despite both the strong intuitive appeal and the preliminary theoretical (e.g., Eriksonian) support for the application of this process, there is a need to shift the conceptualisation of rites of passage from an anthropological and descriptive paradigm (e.g., van Gennep, 1908/1960), to a theoretically-driven framework that supports both operationalisability and empirical

validation (e.g., Markstrom et al., 1998). This, combined with the paucity of interest for this topic within the psychological literature, strongly supports a re-appreciation of the rites of passage paradigm. Such a re-appreciation has the potential to augment both psychological theorising and interventions, and broaden the understanding of adolescent development (Scott, 1998).

An important feature of this review is that further support is provided for the role of ecological approaches within the understanding of adolescent development. Considering the protracted and changing nature of identity formation within contemporary societies, like Australia, the African proverb: “it takes a village to raise a child” would appear to have more relevance than ever.

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CHAPTER 2.

Research Article:

The development of identity for male adolescents in residential care:

Processes and outcomes

Running Head: ADOLESCENT IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The development of identity for male adolescents in residential care: Processes and
outcomes

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Abstract

This study undertook a broad and exploratory analysis of the processes and outcomes of identity development, as they relate to individual domains (e.g., vocational, family), for adolescents residing in the South Australian residential care system. In-depth interviews were conducted with 9 males ($M = 15$ years 9 months), with the collection and analysis of data guided by Grounded Theory. A group feedback session and expert panel validated the emerging themes. Adolescent identity development was characterised by fluidity, both across and within domains. A model of identity development was proposed that conceptualised the emerging themes, with attachment theory guiding the interpretation of thematic relationships. Program and policy implications of the research are tabled.

An increasing number of children and young people are requiring out-of-home care as their family of origin is not a safe and nurturing environment, and/or their parents are unable or unwilling to provide adequate care and protection (AIHW, 2005). Within Australia, the care of the most high need children is often the responsibility of the residential, or congregate, care systems (Ainsworth, 2001). Children and young people residing in residential care have backgrounds of neglect and abuse, exhibit significantly higher levels of emotional, attention and conduct related problems (Delfabbro, Barber & Bentham, 2002), and have impaired levels of cognitive and academic functioning (Crozier & Barth, 2005). These translate to a range of dysfunctional developmental pathways (Perry, 2002), and ultimately, manifest in poorer life outcomes (Bolger & Patterson, 2001; Yancey, 1992). There has been a renewed interest to develop interventions that can significantly promote the long-term wellbeing of children and young people residing in residential care. In this respect, an important adolescent developmental task that is linked to optimal adult functioning is the construction of identity (Erikson, 1968). However, apart from isolated studies (Gavazzi, Alfred & McKenry, 1996; Kools, 1997, 1999), there has been a paucity of literature that has explored this construct within the context of the residential care environment. In response, the purpose of this study is to develop a broad and exploratory understanding of the identity formation process as it relates to young people residing in residential care.

Identity Development

While identity remains a broad and multi-faceted construct that is not easily defined (Erikson, 1968; Moshman, 2005), Erikson described it as both a process and an

outcome of developing an integrated resolution to the questions: ‘who am I?’, ‘where do I fit in this world?’ and ‘where am I going?’. It is a life long process that includes the understanding and integration of oneself in relation to past, present and future orientation (Erikson, 1968; Moshman, 2005). Erikson suggested that inappropriate resolution of this stage may lead to *role confusion* or an *identity crisis*, with the research suggesting that this is linked to reduced life satisfaction and wellbeing, and poorer emotional/behavioural outcomes (Adams, Abraham & Markstrom, 1987; Benson, Harris & Rogers, 1992; Meeus, 1996; Tremblay, Saucier & Tremblay, 2004).

The descriptive approach of Erikson has been significantly extended and operationalised by James Marcia (1966, 1989). Marcia’s (1966) *Identity Status Model* was based upon the premise that identity formation involved active processes of exploration and commitment. Marcia saw exploration as the “relatively guilt- and anxiety-free serious consideration of alternative occupational, ideological, and interpersonal directions” (Marcia, 1989, p. 405), while he operationalised commitment as the level of role resolution and personal investment in a chosen life alternative. Marcia’s (1966) model classified four types of statuses, including: *identity achieved* – commitment to role/s after a period of exploration; *identity diffusion* – lack of commitments combined with limited role exploration; *identity foreclosure* – commitments are made but these are based upon limited personal exploration and may be internalised from others; and *identity moratorium* – period of exploration but with no final decision regarding commitments and roles.

There has been much interest within the identity literature to examine the processes that mediate identity development (Grotevant, 1986, 1987), with this reflected

in contemporary theorising continuing to focus on the roles of exploration (role experimentation) and commitment (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens & Beyers, 2006; Moshman, 2005). A broad and useful model that conceptualises the process of identity development is provided by Grotevant (1987). Consistent with both Marcia's and Erikson's work, Grotevant suggests that exploration is mediated by the interaction of individual characteristics (e.g., personality, cognitive processing styles) and contexts (e.g., culture, family, peers and school), as it relates to specific identity domains (e.g., occupation, ideology, values and relationships). Grotevant suggests that these domains are both mutually interdependent and have distinct developmental pathways.

There is increasing support for both a domain-dependent understanding of identity formation (Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, & Kokko, 2005; Skorikov & Vondracek, 1998) and the role of ecological variables differentially mediating individual domains and exploration patterns (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Alberts, Mbalo & Ackermann, 2003; Bartle-Haring, 1997; Kroger & Green, 1996; Luyckx et al., 2006; Nelson, 2003). These variables provide opportunities and feedback for identity exploration, as well as validate identity statuses. Important variables include: adults (Adamson, Hartman & Lyxell, 1999; Campbell, Adams & Dobson, 1984; Sartor & Youniss, 2002), peers (Pugh & Hart, 1999; Tarrant, 2002), groups or crowds (Brown & Lohr, 1987), attachment patterns (Benson et al., 1992; Meeus, Oosterwegel & Vollebergh, 2002; Zimmerman & Becker-Stoll, 2002), educational institutions (Nurmi, Poole & Kalakoski, 1996), media (Lloyd, 2002), living environment (Nurmi et al., 1996) and socio-cultural factors (Arnett, 1998, 2002; Jensen, 2003).

Identity Development for Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care

A contextual variable that is central to the development of identity is the care environment (Kools, 1997). The majority of studies examining this construct for children in out-of-home care have focused on the outcomes of the identity process. These indicate that children in care present with a devaluated self-concept, as indicated by impaired levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, and negative self-evaluations (Kools, 1997, 1999). Of particular interest, Kools (1997, 1999), utilising a qualitative study based upon Grounded Theory, examined eight male and nine female adolescents' (aged between 15 to 19 years) perception of living within long-term foster care (residential care). Two significant themes were drawn from the research. First, adolescents' self-concept was characterised by a "devaluation of self by others", which Kool's (1997) defined as a "lessening or discounting of one's status by others through beliefs that are, in turn, reflected in their actions" (p. 266). This resulted in the adolescents experiencing depersonalisation, stigmatisation, a lack of a future orientation and a preoccupation to live within the "here and now". Second, children in care engage in a "process of self-protection", which relates to "defenses and related strategies to protect the self from further disappointment, rejection, loss and trauma" (Kools, 1999, p. 143-144). Strategies used by the young people included: hiding foster care status, detaching from others and keeping relationships at a superficial level. Kools (1997) noted that the processes that maintained these themes were largely external to the individual, most notably, the institutionalised nature of the group home (e.g., excessive restriction, lack of individualised care), stereotypical perceptions of foster children and a reduced status of the "foster child".

The literature suggests that children and young people who live away from their biological families have the potential to be “caught in a cycle of separation and loss that affects the way they view themselves, their family relationships, and their futures” (McDermott, 1987, p. 97). A model to understand this process is provided by the separation-individuation hypothesis of adolescent development (Blos, 1967). This model suggests that through the separation or reconfiguration of the parent-adolescent relationship, the child is able to develop autonomously and construct new identity commitments (Kroger & Haslett, 1988; Meeus, Iedema, Maassen & Engels, 2005). However, for many children residing in out-of-home care, they lack a stable figure to separate from, that is, through their physical separation from their family this process of separation and individuation has either occurred earlier or not at all (McDermott, 1987). Thereby, for children and young people residing in out-of-home care, the process of identity development is qualitatively different, more challenging and potentially problematic (Grotevant, 1997; McDermott, 1987; Rosenberg & Horner, 1991; Salah-Din & Bollman, 1994; Yancey, 1992). These children must integrate their current and future selves, the aspects that brought them into care, their loss of parents and their diminished status of being in care into a coherent whole (Grotevant, 1997). This process often occurs within the context of a residential care environment that is characterised by a rotating staff team, high ratio of children to adults, structure and routine, and is potentially emotionally charged (Vollmer, 2005).

Together, this review provides strong support that the process of identity development for children and young people residing in residential care may be qualitatively different to children living with their biological families. While the

processes, outcomes and ecological factors that mediate this process may be distinct, it should not be inferred that this is a pathological process (Grotevant, 1997).

The Current Study

This aim of the current study is to develop a broad and preliminary exploration of the broad processes and outcomes of identity development for male adolescents residing in long-term residential care. The study's design was guided by the following two principles: (1) identity can be understood as a process and outcome of exploration and commitment (Erikson, 1968; Grotevant, 1987; Marcia, 1966) and (2) identity is comprised of a number of differing domains which are both inter-dependent and differentially mediated by contextual variables (Grotevant, 1987). In light of the exploratory nature of this research, a qualitative methodology, based upon Grounded Theory, was used to examine these constructs, with no specific hypotheses generated. The study's methodology was guided and modelled on the previous research by Kools (1997, 1999), but in this case, the sample was limited to a male cohort and a greater emphasis was placed upon the broader ecological processes. It was anticipated that this would elicit an understanding that would provide guidance on future program and policy development.

Method

Design

A qualitative grounded theory design provided the opportunity to develop an exploratory analysis, but at the same time, be responsive to the sensitive nature of the

participant group and maintain a child-centered discourse. This involved a process of inductive analysis where both the elements of the research area, as well as the linkages between the elements, were explored and described in detail (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method places the individual at the centre of investigation, and assumes that there is an interdependent relationship between both the area of interest and the individual. This method remains compatible with symbolic interactionism (Jeon, 2004) and represents a validated qualitative research method (Ponterotto, 2002)

Grounded theory utilises the constant comparative method, which is a process of engaging in simultaneous collection and data analysis and conducting further analysis on the basis of the emerging theory. This process involved the ongoing reduction, convergence and coding of data as it was collected (Jean, 2004). The dynamic and reflexive nature of this design means that the resultant theory has a high level of internal validity (e.g., “grounded”).

Participants

Participants were selected on the basis they were (1) males aged between 14 years 11 months and 17 years of age, (2) had resided within their current residential care facility for a period of at least 6 months, (3) had not lived full time with their biological family for a period of at least 12 months and (4) were on a Care and Protection Order. Exclusion criteria included the presence of significant intellectual or mental impairment (e.g., psychosis). These criteria were designed to recruit a cohort of young men who were in a stable out-of-home placement and approaching the transition to independent living.

At the point of data collection 12 participants fitted the research criteria. Of these, nine participants, average age 15 years 9 months (range 14 years 11 months to 17 years 0 months), were interviewed. Of the three participants who did not take part in the study, one was excluded because he had a therapeutic relationship with the principal researcher, another was in the process of transitioning from his placement and the final participant was unavailable.

The participants had been in their current placement for an average period of 18 months (range 6 months to 37 months). A feature of the participant group was that, on a whole, they had entered the alternative care system within the past seven years, having spent a considerable part of their early childhood (from age 0 to 7) residing with an identified family member. All of the participants had current contact with an identified family member, with six of the participants having had recent contact with at least one of their biological parents. The reasons participants cited for their current placements was attributed to both the family of origin (domestic violence, substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment and loss of parent to death) and personal factors (emotional or behavioral deregulation, intra-family abuse and violence). Agency feedback provided to the principal researcher indicated that the participant group represented a cohort of young men who were relatively stable, and presented with low to moderate levels of challenging and at-risk behaviour.

Setting

The participants were drawn from residential care facilities run by the Department of Families and Communities (Families SA) in Adelaide, South Australia. Having a

statutory mandate to support and care for young people until they reach 18 years of age, the system is geared to transitioning young people to independent living prior to this point (usually 16 to 17 years of age). Each residential care unit houses between 8 and 11 young people, and at any one time, each unit is staffed by up to three youth workers who are trained and accredited to Certificate III in Youth Work. The South Australian residential care system is moving towards a therapeutic driven service based upon attachment theory and has access to increasing levels of psychological support.

Interview

A semi-structured interview, utilising open questions, guided the collection of data. The design and content of this interview was based upon two principals. First, identity development represents an integration of one's past, present and future orientation (Erikson, 1968). Second, identity has both a global dimension (e.g., self-concept) and is comprised of individual domains that are mediated by contextual variables. The interview template covered a range of identity domains (existential, self concept, future orientation, care experience, family, relationships and group membership) and mediating factors (daily activities, school, peers, residential care environment and adults).

Procedure

A pool of participants, fitting the broad research criteria, was identified with the support of agency management. Each participant was approached by the researcher, supported by location supervisors and youth workers, and provided detailed written and

verbal information on the proposed research. All participants who were approached provided both their verbal and written consent. At this point, the participant's allocated caseworker's formal consent was also obtained. Each participant was remunerated with a \$30.00 gift voucher. This was seen as an important feature of the study considering the significant time commitment.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in a quiet and confidential location within the participant's residential care facility. After the second interview, the researcher discussed the emerging transcript content with a senior researcher. It was concluded that the participant responses were restricted to concrete representations, with there being an impaired ability to generate responses that provided deeper content meaning or self awareness. In response, and in line with the Grounded Theory methodology, the questioning template was changed in two ways. First, greater emphasis was placed on understanding the role, function and importance of each domain of enquiry for the individual, as opposed to having to infer this from the previous interview template. Second, an abstract or imaginative scenario was interspersed within the questioning. One example of this included:

A big meteorite is about to hit the Earth and you have been lucky enough to win a lottery ticket so that a Martian is going to come down and pick you up to take you to a safe planet. Now this planet has basically nothing on it...it's very basic. The Martian says to you, 'you can take your three best friends', who would you take with you on the spaceship?...Why?

These changes led to increased content depth and generation of underlying meaning. The remaining interviews evolved as per the Grounded Theory approach and were assisted by a senior researcher providing regular feedback. These interviews ranged from 65 to 100

minutes, with an average of 85 minutes in duration. Each interview was broken by a 10 minute refreshment break.

At the conclusion of the nine interviews, the researcher re-interviewed the first two participants incorporating the updated line of questioning. This provided a further opportunity to validate the emerging themes and working hypotheses, as well as ensure that all content areas were covered. These two interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. All of the interviews were audiotaped and externally transcribed.

Data Analysis and Validation

The first stage of data analysis involved a line-by-line analysis of each transcript. Each line was evaluated and manually coded in respect to precise content and implicit and explicit meaning. Themes were assigned to nodes, in which, in the first instance, clustered around the differing identity domains, and within these domains a number of sub-themes emerged. Both the themes and thematic relationships resonated with the literature on identity exploration/commitment (e.g., Marcia) and attachment theory. This was used as a framework for interpretation, as well as assisted in the naming of themes.

Throughout the interview process diary notes were kept that included general perceptions and observations. Internal validity was achieved through a senior researcher cross-checking the codes and themes that emerged from a sample of the transcripts. The constant comparative method was a further means to verify the internal validity of the data (Jeon, 2004). At the conclusion of the initial analysis, a panel of experts, comprised of psychologists, unrelated to the research, but experienced in working with clients in a range of alternative care settings, provided a further validation check. The panel

provided analysis and critique on the theoretical and applied implications of the thematic content, as well as feedback on an earlier draft of the identity development model.

Six weeks after the conclusion of the interviews, all of the participants (eight participants attended) were invited to partake in a group feedback session and provide critique and analysis of the themes and emerging theoretical position. The participants were provided an opportunity to read their own transcripts, and this process elicited a range of useful observational data.

Results

Identity Development as a Fluid and Domain Dependent Process

An overarching theme identified within this research is that the process of identity development for adolescents residing in residential care is characterised by variability and fluidity, both across and within identity domains. This process was mediated by a range of contextual variables. For instance, relationship break-ups, changing peer groups and adult/peer feedback all impacted on the identity development process and the way respondents constructed their current and future selves. An example of this was highlighted by one respondent, who at the time of initial interview, had a close relationship with a girlfriend who figured prominently both within the perception of his current self and future orientation, and was suggestive of an identity commitment. This relationship subsequently dissolved, and at the point of reading his transcript (group feedback session), the respondent indicated that he was notably embarrassed that this relationship had previously engulfed all parts of his life. He indicated that he had made a number of significant re-evaluations since this point in time.

Overall, the identity development process was characterised by the following features. First, there was significant exploration and role experimentation (moratorium) within the domains of relationships, peers and daily activities/pursuits. Second, there were high levels of identity diffusion (no identity exploration or commitments) within the abstract domains (ideology, existentialism), and for some, this also extended to their future orientation and vocational goals. Third, robust and emerging identity commitments were found within the domains relating to adolescents' transition to self-responsibility and willingness to develop stronger and more connected relationships with family. Apart from this, there were few identity commitments, and the commitments that were made, tended to be prematurely developed and based upon limited exploration. In the background of this fluid and domain-dependent process, Table 1 provides a summary of the themes that emerged within this study.

Self-Concept

Dualistic construction of self. The respondents described themselves in both positively and negatively framed attributions (dualistic constructions). In the majority of cases, the negative attributions were elicited with minimal probing. The following self-descriptions highlight the dualistic nature of this construction: “pretty relaxed most of the times; do get angry sometimes”, “a nice person – sometimes mean, sometimes nice”, “a person who’s caring, funny and sometimes a bit silly” and “can be a little shit, easy going, friendly, funny, good sportsman”. As noted with these examples, positive attributions tended to be global in nature, while negative attributions showed a tendency to be linked to behavioural traits.

Table 1.
Summary of Major Themes

Primary theme	Sub category	Summary
Self-concept	Dualistic construction of self	Descriptions of self are characterised by both positive (global) and negative (contextual, behavioural) self-evaluations
	Heightened sensitivity to behavioural traits	Descriptions of self suggest heightened sensitivity (and self-monitoring) of behavioural traits
Family	Family connectedness as an emergent identity commitment	Family remains central to the lives, future and commitments of the young men
Adults	Provide opportunities for exploration	Adult figures are central to initiating opportunities (e.g., education, recreation) for identity exploration
	Feedback, encouragement and validation	Adults provide crucial feedback, encouragement and validation of identity roles, self-evaluation and exploration
Residential environment	Home as a secure base	The residential environment is a “home” that provides basic needs, comfort and security
	Central driving mechanism	The residential environment, through its structure and adult relationships, drives identity exploration
	Residents as a reference group	Residents provide a ready-made reference group linked to social comparison and self-evaluation
Historical self	Implicit shame	An underlying (or unconscious) shame mediates current self-evaluations and identity processing
Friends and relationships	Activities as a fluid and central source of exploration	Identity exploration occurs extensively through peer-based activities (e.g., smoking, video games) and this remains a fluid and dynamic process
	Support, space and encouragement	Friends provide support, encouragement and space from adult figures/residential environment to aid the exploration process
Future self	Transition to self-responsibility through personal development	The young men, through a process of personal development, are transitioning to self-responsibility (an identity commitment)
	Vocational role ambiguity	The young men are in a process of exploring vocational roles, but exhibit minimal commitment or insight to realise these roles
	Individualistic and ambitious future orientation	Future orientation is characterised by travel, major sports roles (e.g., footballer, pro-surfer) and individualistic dreams and goals
	Normality as the end point	The strive for normality represents an end point within the participant’s future orientation

Heightened sensitivity to behavioural traits. As noted, the evaluation of behavioural traits, often relating to negative self-constructions, figured prominently within the respondents' discourse. For instance, one respondent commented: "sometimes my mind goes a bit silly and I make stupid comments. That's one of my weaknesses too; it's one of my major downfalls". This pattern was linked to social comparisons made with peers, and evaluation and feedback attributed to significant adults. Overall, the discourse suggested that the respondents exhibited a heightened "sensitivity" to their behavioural traits, and while not explicitly suggested, the overall pattern was indicative of higher levels of self-monitoring and cognitive biases in the processing of such information. The majority of respondents indicated that their negative behavioural traits were an area of future growth or improvement.

Family Connectedness as an Emergent Identity Commitment

The importance of consolidating and improving family (including biological parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles and aunts) connectedness was a universal theme. For many it was an aspect of their life that was becoming increasingly important. They were committed to a process of further exploring and understanding their family relations. Family represented an area of permanence, and as shown by the following example, connectedness is retained even after contact has not occurred for a significant period of time:

- Q: So what role do they [family] have in your life at the moment?
A: Not a big factor any more but I still need them to be there because they are my real family and my real parents.
Q: So what do you mean by that?

- A: I can't just let them go because I know they're my real family and, yes, I don't know.
- Q: So even though you don't see them they are still part of your life.
- A: Yes.
- Q: So how are they part of your life now?
- A: I'd like to forget them but I just can't. It's just - I don't know - it's just something about me saying I can't forget them.

This example also highlights that family relationships were seen as distinct from other adult relationships. The respondents largely described family relationships in terms of reciprocated “love”, as opposed to “care” and “support” that were attributed in an ego-central way to other adult figures.

Adults

The adolescents had a large number of adults in their life who were seen as important, but having individually distinct roles. The respondents differed significantly in their preparedness to seek independence from adult figures.

Provide opportunities for exploration. Adults had a central role in providing and facilitating opportunities for identity exploration. This extended to the delivery of activities, education, programs, recreational and vocational pursuits, as well as conversations they had to support the adolescents explore both abstract concepts (e.g., existentialism) and future orientations.

Feedback, encouragement and validation. The adults were central in encouraging exploration, providing feedback in relation to roles and behaviours, and validating adolescent self-evaluations. This extended to feedback in relation to self-development: “I'm a lot less violent and I'm not using as much drugs so they say I've improved a lot because I was using drugs heaps when I first came here”; validation of

roles: “I’ve got told I’m a lot more mature or something like that and I should be a role model for the younger ones”; and areas of ongoing improvement: “They don’t want me to be stupid and do little things that are childish. They just want me to grow up to be a better person - to be a man.”

Residential Environment

The residential care environment featured prominently in the respondents’ discourse. While the subjective appraisal of this environment varied significantly across the respondent group, three strong themes emerged.

Home as a secure base. All young men described the residential environment as “home”, and for a number of respondents, this was analogous to a family environment. It was described as a place to have one’s basic needs met, including food, warmth, shelter, as well as a place of care, safety and protection. All of the participants were asked to nominate an adult, or groups of adults, they would want to speak to if they were afraid, scared or in trouble. Eight of the nine participants chose an adult figure from their residential care facility, suggesting that this environment is a source of comfort and security. Staff members from the respondents’ residential care facilities figured prominently within their discourse and had elevated positions within their hierarchy of adults within the lives of the young people.

Central driving mechanism. The residential environment was found to have a central role in generating opportunities for identity exploration and providing feedback, validation and encouragement. The majority of respondents were able to explicitly recognise the role of the residential environment in this regard. A feature of the

residential environment was the non-volitional “push” that is exerted on the residents. This push was found to occur on two levels. First, through the role of individual staff members strongly encouraging and supporting residents to undertake and explore a range of activities or pursuits. Respondents explained this as follows:

I would want to do it but then I'd back off and then [name] would like then push me that extra step and then I'd want to go out and...do it.

I'm a person who sometimes gives up on things because sometimes they get too hard, but then there's always someone there to help me to get around that thing.

Second, the push was exerted through the structure, expectations and routine of the residential environment requiring residents to undertake educational/vocational pursuits and other extracurricular activities. The respondents, overall, described this push in positive terms, but there were also a number of ambivalent responses, for instance:

It's good to have someone that pushes you in the right direction, because then you get stuff done. But sometimes it's annoying when you get pushed in the right direction, you just turn around and tell them to get stuffed.

Residents as a reference group. The residential environment provided the respondents with a ready-made reference group to generate social comparisons. Again, comparisons extensively focused on the respondents' behavioural traits. For instance, one respondent commented: “My strength is that I'm mature, I'm a lot more mature than anyone here”. For a small number of respondents, the resident group also provided an opportunity to socially define themselves in relation to their peers (e.g., “brother”).

Historical Self

Implicit shame. An analysis of the respondents' discourse of their previous history, and supported by their current self-perceptions and behaviours, suggested that they experience elevated levels of underlying (or unconscious) shame. For instance, over half of the adolescents internalised, or blamed themselves, for coming into care. Attributions cited by the respondents included: "I wasn't controllable", "I was a little terror" and "I was never a good kid". In addition, all of the respondents indicated that they hide their foster care status from both their peers and adults outside of their care environment. It was described by one respondent as being a "really hidden thing". Respondents indicated that they employed a range of strategies to hide their foster care status, including avoidance, blatant lying and only revealing their secret to their most trusting friends.

Friends and Relationships

Activities as a fluid and central source of exploration. Friends and relationships, including girlfriends, featured prominently within the respondents' discourse. In the majority of cases, the respondents had a fluid set of relationships, with this being most pronounced for respondents with smaller friendship networks external to their residential environment. Relationships were universally described in the context of mutually shared activities, including school, sports, bike riding, smoking, drug use, criminal activity, playing video games and watching television. Peers provided opportunities for identity exploration, and owing to the variable nature of the respondents' peer group, this fluidity also translated to the exploration process. This was affirmed by a number of respondents

who indicated that they had stopped using drugs in response to previous friends and residents leaving their residential facility.

Support, space and encouragement. Peers provided the adolescents with invaluable support, encouragement and for some respondents, peer pressure to undertake role exploration. Friends also provide space and opportunities to escape from the stressors of the residential care environment.

Future Self

Transition to self-responsibility through personal development. The adolescents perceived themselves in a transition between childhood and adulthood, with the endpoint being independence, self-responsibility or as one young respondent described it, “taking care of yourself”. This transition represented a role commitment, with all of the respondents aware that their current levels of case management and care will cease when they reach 18 years of age. The respondents acknowledged that they must undergo further personal development (e.g., acquire independent living skills, become more “mature”) before reaching this point. A number of respondents stated that this process of personal development first started at the point they came into care.

Vocational role ambiguity. The respondents’ future vocational roles were characterised by few, if any, identity commitments, and fluctuating levels of exploration. One respondent described his vocational exploration as follows: “I was going to look for a trade but I stopped that, I don’t know why. But I’ll probably get back on a track of trade or another”. Vocational role exploration centered on the areas of hospitality (e.g., chef, cook) and trade (e.g., plumber, electrician). In the majority of cases, the respondents

showed minimal insight into the concrete processes or intermediate goals required to achieve their stated vocational roles.

Individualistic and ambitious future orientation. Beyond their immediate transition process to self-responsibility, the respondents' goals for the future were characterised by ambitious and individualistic pursuits. For a number of adolescents this included striving to be a professional sports player, while for others it related to ambitious vocational pursuits (e.g., owning a restaurant) or materialistic achievements (e.g., obtaining a big house and car). For some respondents, future goals and ambitions also extended to interstate and international travel (e.g., Europe or North America).

Normality as a process and endpoint. The strive for normality, or “to have a normal life”, featured prominently within the respondents' discourse. For a number of respondents, their self-descriptions contained elements of wanting to see themselves as being normal, but universally, it was an important endpoint in itself. This endpoint frequently related to the adolescents' desire for their children and family to obtain socially constructed markers of success and normality (e.g., marriage, children, owning a house and car, and employment). Respondents explained this as follows:

I don't want my kids to end up in a place like this, or in foster care. I just want to have a regular life.

I want to have good kids that have good parents and like are not alcoholics so they don't go in foster care and have the experience that I had, and have the trouble that I had. And my wife, she's going to be very nice to our kids and me.

I'm going to have my own family hopefully, big house, car. I'm going to have furniture and stuff... and I'll be able to look after my own children, when they move out of home, then they can look after us when we're old.

Discussion

This aim of the current study was to undertake an exploratory analysis of the broad processes and outcomes of identity development for male adolescents residing in long-term residential care. This identity process was found to be characterised by variability and fluidity, both across and within identity domains. This was distinguished by active exploration (moratorium) and identity diffusion (no identity exploration or commitments) within specific domains. The most prominent levels of exploration (or moratorium) occurred within the domains of relationships, peers and daily activities/pursuits. A committed identity status was found in the adolescents' transition to self-responsibility. In respect to Marcia's (1966) *Identity Status Model*, this represents a foreclosed status that is driven and internalised by a departmental (i.e., Families SA) necessity for adolescents to transition to independent living prior to the age of 18. The domain of family connectedness would appear an emergent identity commitment. Identity diffusion, or a lack of exploration or commitments, was most prominent within the abstract domains (ideology, existentialism). Overall, strong support was provided for a domain-based understanding of identity development (Grotevant, 1987).

The future orientation of the young men, which reflects their future plans, dreams and intentions, was characterised by an exploratory, at times superficial, analysis that centered on the achievement of materialistic, ambitious and individualistic future goals. For some respondents this was characterised by identity diffusion, while for others, it was based upon a foreclosed status where commitments were made after minimal exploration. Future vocational roles were characterised by much ambiguity and confusion, with a number of young people exhibiting the inability to articulate the concrete strategies for

future goal attainment. This theme, suggesting a preference for the adolescents to respond to life within the “here and now”, was previously found by Kools (1999). The adolescents’ strive for normal roles, responsibilities and achievements would appear characteristic of young people who have come from backgrounds of disadvantage (McDermott, 1987).

While caution is had in comparing this cohort’s identity profile to a cohort residing within their family of origin, overall, there would appear more similarities than differences within this developmental pattern. For instance, the pronounced exploration of relationships, peers and daily activities/pursuits (Tarrant, 2002), along with the restricted exploration of more abstract domains (e.g., existentialism) (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996), is a common developmental pattern considering the respondents’ age. That is, it is a normal process that differing identity domains come into “focus” at different times during adolescent development (Coleman, 1978), with the literature suggesting that the level of identity exploration and commitment increases with age (Meeus et al., 2005). However, two features of the above identity pattern warrant brief comment. First, it is reasonable to assume that the fluidity in peer and adult relations (and extending to the identity developmental process) is more pronounced for children residing in residential care. Second, while the identity transition to self-responsibility is a feature of Western society (Arnett, 2002, 2002), the foreclosed and expedient nature of this process would appear unique to this group. Together, further support is provided that, compared to adolescents residing in their family of origin, the identity development process of young people in residential care is both qualitatively different and has the potential to be more

challenging (Grotevant, 1997; McDermott, 1987; Rosenberg & Horner, 1991; Salah-Din & Bollman, 1994; Yancey, 1992).

Model of Identity Development

This study set out to understand the processes of identity development for adolescents residing in long-term residential care, and was inspired by the process and domain-specific model proposed by Grotevant (1987). In support of others (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Alberts et al., 2003; Bartle-Haring, 1997; Kroger & Green, 1996; Luyckx et al., 2006; Nelson, 2003), this current study upholds the importance of contextual and ecological variables within identity development, but most notably, the role of the residential care environment within this process (Kools, 1997, 1999). Considering the importance of this variable, a model is proposed that extends Grotevant's (1987) work, but is significantly furthered from research and theory derived from the attachment literature. Attachment theory is increasingly influencing child welfare interventions and planning (Schofield, 2002). The proposed model is presented in Figure 1. This model conceptualises the exploration processes as it relates to singular domains (e.g., family, vocational roles, ideology). The individual's self-concept is conceptualised as sitting outside the domain-dependent exploration process, and as such, comes under the mediation of a number of different domains (e.g., Domain B). Individual aspects of the model, as they relate to the study's findings and the research literature, are discussed in detail.

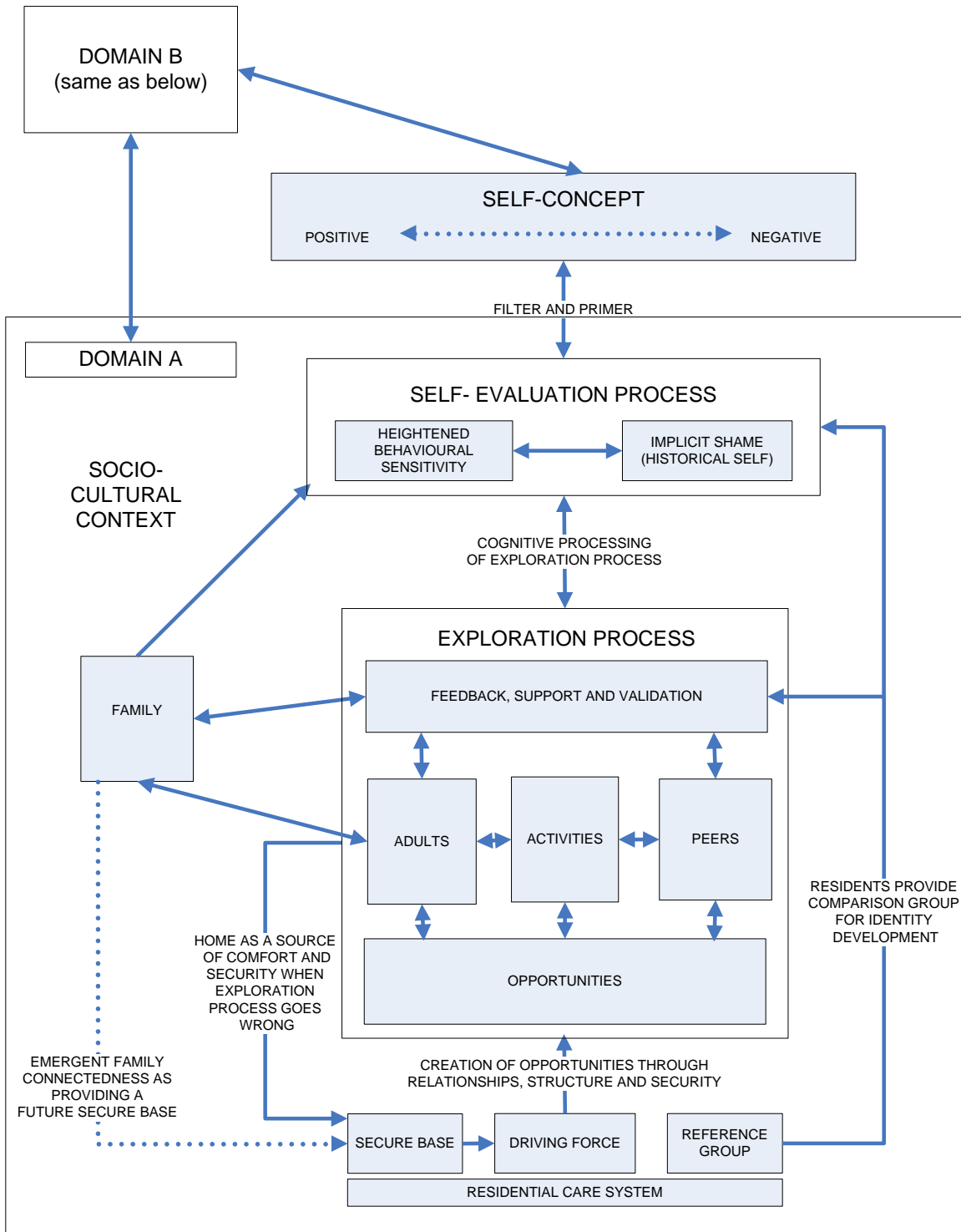


Figure 1. Model of identity development for adolescents residing in residential care

Residential Care System

Secure base. The residential environment represents a secure base where adolescents may have both their physical (food, warmth and shelter) and emotional (support, feelings of security) needs met. In regard to attachment theory, Bowlby (1969/1982) suggested that through the consistent, responsive and nurturing actions of a caregiver, infants develop a secure and trusting internal working model. When this occurs, adults become a “secure base” by which sensorimotor exploration is supported and comfort is provided when children become hurt or distressed (Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman & Powell, 2002).

There are overwhelming similarities between attachment theory and the process of identity exploration as proposed by Marcia (1966) (for review see Benson et al., 1992). In short, both models value the importance of the parent-child relationship in fostering security and trust (e.g., secure base) as the foundation for exploration. Marcia (1983, 1989) and others (e.g., Schofield, 2002) suggest that the experience of security in the adult relationship supports adolescents to undergo exploration as they feel secure that “failures can be brought back to a safe and caring context from which to venture forth again” (Marcia, 1989, p. 407). There is strong literature support for the relationship between positive identity development and both parental (Benson et al., 1992; Blustein, Prezioso & Schultheiss, 1995; Franz & White, 1985; Meeus et al., 2002; Rice, 1990; Scharf, Mayselless & Kivenson-Baron, 2004; Zimmerman & Becker-Stoll, 2002) and peer attachment (Ashley, 2003; Gavin & Furman, 1989; Meeus et al., 2002).

Driving force. The residential care system has a central role in generating opportunities for identity exploration, with this characterised by the non-volitional “push” that is exerted onto the adolescents by this environment’s staff members, routine and structure. There is strong literature support that parental figures who provide structure, boundaries and encouragement, when delivered within the context of nurturing and secure relationships, foster positive identity development within their children (Barber, 1997; Sartor & Youniss, 2002). The model suggests that while the residential environment is the catalyst for identity exploration, this can only occur after a secure base has been achieved. Therefore, residential environments that (1) provide a secure base and (2) drive opportunities for identity exploration are in the best position to foster identity development.

Reference group. The residential care environment provides a ready-made peer reference group that mediates identity exploration and self-evaluation (Eccles, Barber, Stone & Hunt, 2003; Tarrant, 2002). Opportunities for self-comparison remain central to young people in western societies, as identity is largely formed by how individuals distinguish themselves from others, as opposed to their collective roles (Arnett, 2000; Musschenga, 2000).

The Exploration Process

The exploration process is mediated by three inter-dependent and significant agents: adults, peers and activities. Adults and peers have a central role in initiating and supporting opportunities for identity exploration, providing feedback and validating statuses (Adamson et al., 1999; Campbell et al., 1984; Eccles et al., 2003; Meeus et al.,

2002; Pugh & Hart, 1999; Sartor & Youniss, 2002; Tarrant, 2002). This process primarily occurs within the context of shared activities. That is, “adolescents explore who they are by participating in activities with their peers within the context of the peer culture” (Pugh & Hart, 1999, p. 69). The provision of extracurricular activities, occurring within the context of adult and peer relationships, is associated with positive identity development (Eccles et al., 2003).

This study identified that, while peers were a central and consistent feature of the adolescent’s life (Tarrant, 2002), the respondents varied in their degree of separation and individuation from adult figures (Kroger & Haslett, 1988; Meeus et al., 2005). As supported by the literature (Tarrant, 2002), the proposed model suggests that greater separation (or segregation) from adult figures will result in adolescents having a greater reliance on their peer group to support their identity exploration.

Family

A strong theme within this study was the emerging connectedness and importance of the family for adolescents residing in out-of home (McDermott, 1987, Schofield, 2002). Identification and positive contact with birth families has been previously associated with higher levels of self-esteem (Salahu-Din & Bollman, 1994) and psychosocial functioning (Delfabbro, Barber & Lesley, 2002). While, within this model, the family is depicted external to the exploration process, it continues to support identity exploration, be a source of feedback and validation of exploration statuses, and contribute to the self-evaluation process. It also represents an identity domain in its own right. For a small number of adolescents, the family presented with qualities suggesting that it was a

“secure base”. While this study cannot adequately explain the reasons why the adolescents sought increased connectedness with family, what is known is that the adolescents were able to report explicitly that departmental service provision ceases when they turn 18 years of age. One hypothesis, therefore, is that increased family connectedness represents a means for the adolescents to transfer their secure base from their care environment to their family, thereby supporting post-18 identity exploration. This hypothesis warrants further empirical validation.

Socio-Cultural Context

The socio-cultural context remains an important facet of the identity development process (Arnett, 1998; Grotevant, 1987). For instance, within this study, the adolescents’ future orientation centered on the attainment of self-responsibility and materialistic pursuits. This profile is characteristic of young people socialised within a Western or individualistic society (Arnett, 2002).

Self-Evaluation Processes

In line with both previous models (e.g., Grotevant, 1987) and research (Moshman, 2005), this model suggests that identity exploration is cognitively evaluated and assessed. Within the study, the themes of underlying (or implicit) shame and heightened sensitivity to behavioural traits would appear significant within this cognitive processing. The aspect of shame has been previously identified with adolescents in residential care (Kools, 1999) and has been linked to mistreatment (harsh parenting, domestic violence and abuse) and rejecting parenting styles (Hughes, 2004; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005).

Self-Concept - Dualistic Construction of Self

The adolescents' self-concept was characterised by positive and negative (dualistic) self-evaluations. As previously reported by Kools (1999), while adolescents in care may initially present as competent and happy, once the surface has been scratched, a number of negative self-evaluations are elicited. This finding is consistent with Kools (1997) research that suggests adolescents in residential care experience a devaluation of the self. Within this model, the self-concept sits outside the identity exploration process attached to individual domains. The self-concept is, therefore, the focal point, or the core of the individual's identity (Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Glodis & Blasi, 1993); an aspect that is influenced by a number of individual domains.

The model suggests that the self-concept is strongly mediated by the cognitive evaluation of the exploration process. It is postulated that heightened behavioural sensitivity and implicit shame may lead to a number of cognitive processing biases, including the filtering or priming of information, self-monitoring of behavioural traits and processing of information in a schema consistent manner. To this end, the underlying shame, through the noted cognitive biases, will directly impact on the self-concept, with the end result being the presentation of negative self-evaluations. Previous research has found that adolescents in care engage in a process of self-protection to guard themselves from this shame (Kools, 1999). Within this study, this was explicitly shown by the adolescents' preoccupation to hide their foster care status. At an implicit level, it could be argued that the ambitious, bordering on grandiose, future plans (e.g., being a professional sports player) of the respondents represented a further means of self-protection.

Conclusion and Implications

The proposed model represents the first attempt to develop a process understanding of identity development for adolescents residing in residential care. While it appears descriptively sound and conceptually valid for the current context, both the model and a number of individual constructs require empirical validation. By engaging in this broad and exploratory analysis it is hoped that further research and theorising will be stimulated. Extreme caution must be had in the wholesale generalisation of the research findings. Without further research, the findings would appear limited to adolescents who (1) are residing within a relatively stable placement, (2) present with low to medium levels of at-risk behaviour and (3) had spent a considerable part of their early childhood (age 0 to 7) with an identified family member. Despite this, the identity literature suggests that there are few sex-differences in identity development (Archer, 1994; Moshman, 2005), therefore, the generalisability of the study to a female cohort exhibiting a similar profile is cautiously supported.

In comparing the current study to Kools (1997, 1999), both studies reported that children in care exhibit a self-concept that has elements suggestive of a “devaluation of self”. Kools (1997) reported that this was linked to the external actions of “others”, most notably, the residential environment and care system (e.g., excessive restriction, lack of individualised care, stereotypical perceptions of foster children and a reduced status of the “foster child”). Conversely, within this study, this pattern of negative self-evaluation was linked to the internal processes of shame, behavioural sensitivity and associated cognitive biases. This suggests that the South Australian residential care system is not negatively impacting on adolescent identity formation. Instead, there is strong, but

preliminary support, that the care and services provided by these residential facilities, noted by the presence of secure and responsive adult-child relationships, remains conducive to the achievement of positive developmental trajectories and outcomes. Together, both this study and Kools' (1997, 1999) highlight the importance of understanding identity development within a framework involving both individual and contextual variables. Further research, involving multivariate analysis, is required to isolate the individual roles and functions of these variables.

There is increasing interest to develop both programs and policies that will support identity development for children in care (McDermott, 1987; Yancey, 1998). This research identifies a range of areas for ongoing policy and program development. First, wherever possible, family identification should be supported and maintained (e.g., utilising life-story books) (Salahu-Din & Bollman, 1994). Second, caregivers, mentors, case workers and significant adult figures should actively encourage, support and provide feedback in relation to the processes of identity exploration and commitment (Marcia, 1989). Access to extracurricular activities (Eccles et al., 2003) and the use of role models or mentors (Yancey, 1998) are further means to foster identity development. Third, residential care environments should remain pro-active in guiding identity exploration in a wide range of identity domains and provide opportunities and interventions to "normalise" this process (Kools, 1997). This provision should remain inclusive of the development of a secure base, with the importance of fostering adolescent-adult attachment relationships noted in this regard (Moses, 2000). Lastly, adolescents in care need ongoing concrete, reality-based guidance about future options and planning (Kools, 1997).

Identity development for children and young people in residential care remains a crucial developmental task for optimal adult functioning. It is hoped that this study has not only highlighted the importance of this process, but has encouraged both practitioners and researchers to remain committed to its examination and application.

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Appendices

INVITATION TO SUPPORT A RESEARCH PROJECT WITHIN CYFS ALTERNATIVE CARE

7th May 2006

Dear

I am writing requesting your support and consent for a client of yours to take part in a research project titled: **“Who am I” within the context of the care environment**. The project is being conducted as part of my Masters in Psychology (Clinical) degree. This study is therefore a private undertaking although I am currently employed within CYFS in the role of Trainee Psychologist. For the purposes of the study I will be jointly supervised by Lorren Arezio, the Chief Clinical Psychologist Alternative Care, and Karen Heseltine from the University of South Australia.

The broad aim of the current study is to understand the way in which young men living in out-of-home care construct their personal identities (e.g., broadly speaking: who are they, where are they going?). The study will also attempt to understand how these young men make sense of the transition from adolescence to adulthood (e.g., what does it mean to be an adult, when will adulthood be reached?). The research will also provide the opportunity to compare these constructions in relation to the young men’s current living arrangements, that is, congregate as opposed to family based care systems.

At an applied level, this research will provide a rare opportunity to understand the way in which young people make sense of their life within the context of the care environment. The results of the study have the potential to offer significant insight into the way the alternative care environments can further support both identity development and the transition to adulthood. This will have important flow on effects within the provision of future placement planning, case-management, intervention strategies, and staff training and development. Most importantly, it is envisaged the research will offer some insight into how the transition to adulthood, and post-CYFS intervention, can be supported.

The research will involve interviewing your client for approximately 90 minutes. The interview will occur within a location of your client’s choosing. The interview will be largely non-structured and will take the form of a narrative or story telling format. Specifically, the interview will draw out your client’s opinion or feelings towards his: current placement, caregivers, significant adults, social outlets, friends, impact of the alternative care system, future plans, self-perception, value base and the perception of adulthood. Your client will be free to talk about topics of his choosing, and by the same token, refrain from topics he feels uncomfortable talking about. During the analysis stage, your client will also be provided the opportunity to discuss with the researcher any themes that emerge from this research. Consent for follow up contact will be obtained with the young person at the time of the interview.

It is worth noting that your client's involvement in this study is totally voluntary. Either yourself, or your client are free to withdraw their consent at any time without prejudice. For his involvement within the study, your client will receive a gift voucher from Sanity Records to the value of \$30.00.

Please be assured that the confidentiality of your client will be maintained at all times. To assist within the qualitative analysis, the interview will be audio taped and transcribed to a written transcript. Both the written and audio transcripts will be managed as per the DFC code of Fair Information Practice, and at no time, will your client's identity be compromised. All written transcripts, audio-tapes and interview notes will be secured within the University of South Australia, School of Psychology (City East Campus), for a period of not less than seven years. All records containing personal information will remain confidential and no information which could lead to the identification of any individual will be released.

This research has been approved by the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee and the Department of Families and Research Development Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or rights as a participant please contact Vicki Allen, the Executive Officer of the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee, Tel: 8302 3118, Email Vicki.allen@unisa.edu.au. Alternatively, you may wish to contact the research supervisor, Karen Heseltine, on Tel: 8302 1007, Email Karen.heseltine@unisa.edu.au.

Should you require additional information regarding this research, please contact myself on 0417 846 103.

Thank you for considering this request.

Ivan Raymond
Phone: 0417 846 103
Fax: 8342 0186
Ivan.Raymond@dfc.sa.gov.au

Your support is greatly appreciated

ATTENTION: IVAN RAYMOND

FAX: 8342 0186

GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Short Project Title: “Whom Am I” in the Context of the Care Environment

- I have read the Guardian Information Sheet
- I consent for my client to be involved in the study.
- I understand that the interview will be audio-taped.
- I understand that while information gained in the study may be published, all records containing personal information will remain confidential, and no information which could lead to the identification of any individual will be released. Confidentiality will only be broken if my client raises issues related to child protection or provides information that indicates immanent risk to self or others. In either case, the Principal Researcher will notify me immediately.
- I understand that participants are free to withdraw at any stage without prejudice.
- I understand that participation is entirely voluntary. My client is free to withdraw his consent at any time. My client will receive the gift voucher at the point in time he withdraws his consent, or at the conclusion of the interview.
- I would like a detailed copy of the study’s findings. Yes / No
- I would like an abbreviated copy of the study’s findings. Yes / No

Name of Guardian: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

YOUR CHANCE TO HAVE YOUR SAY – UNDERSTANDING YOUR CARE EXPERIENCE

(>>insert date here>>)

Dear (<<participant's name>>>>)

I am writing as a follow-up to our telephone conversation this week. I would like to ask for your help and consent to take part in a research project I am undertaking as part of my Masters in Psychology degree. The project is titled: **“Who am I” Within the Context of the Care Environment”**.

The aim of the study is to understand the way in which young men, like yourself, make sense of life, and where you see yourself going in the future. You have already indicated that you are willing to take part in the study. In this case, I just wanted to confirm a couple of things with you. I will be meeting you at (<<time, date>>) at the (<<location of interview>>). The interview will take no longer than 90 minutes.

During the interview I will be asking you to talk about your current placement, caregivers, significant adults, social outlets, friends, impact of living in care, future plans and adulthood. This is your chance to have your say about what you like and what you don't like about your care experience. You will be free to talk about topics of your choosing and refrain from topics that you feel uncomfortable with. Approximately 6 weeks after the interview you will be provided the opportunity to discuss with myself any themes that emerge from this research.

It is worth noting that your involvement in this study is totally voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time. If you decide to take part in the study you will receive a gift voucher from Sanity Records to the value of \$30.00. Even if you withdraw your consent during the interview, you will still receive the voucher. If you have second thoughts about your involvement in the study, please give me a call on (<<insert phone number>>). If you decide not to take part in the interview this will have no impact on your current placement.

Please be assured (<<participant's name>>) that your name and identity will be kept confidential at all times. To help me make sense of all the different interviews, I am requesting that the interview is audio taped to be later transcribed to a written transcript.

(<<participant's name>>), I really value your involvement in this study. The results of this study will hopefully make the future care experiences of young people much more satisfying and supportive. I look forward to catching up with you. If you have any further questions please give me a call on (<<insert phone number>>).

Kind Regards

Ivan Raymond

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Short Project Title: “Whom Am I” in the Context of the Care Environment

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have had its contents explained to me by Ivan Raymond.
- I consent to being interviewed for the purpose of this research.
- I understand that this interview will be audio-taped and will take no longer than 90 minutes.
- I understand that while information gained in the study may be published, all records containing personal information will remain confidential, and no information which could lead to the identification of any individual will be released. The only time confidentiality will be broken is if I raise issues related to being hurt by adult figures (e.g., abuse) or provide information that indicates immanent risk to self or others.
- I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time without this impacting on my current placement or the level of services provided by CYFS. This includes asking for the interview or the audio-taping to be stopped at any time. I will receive the gift voucher at the point in time I withdraw my consent, or the interview finishes.
- I understand that I do not have to answer any question or talk about any subject matter that I do not feel comfortable talking about.
- The opportunity is provided to you to further discuss with the researcher any themes that emerge from this research. Do you consent for the researcher to phone you at a later date to discuss with you any of the themes that emerge?

Yes / No

- Would you like a copy of the study’s findings Yes / No

Name of Participant _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS

Journal of Research on Adolescence
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