

# EVOLVING IDENTITIES

*Contents and processes of identity development  
among people in their late twenties*

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## ABSTRACT

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The overall aim of this thesis was to study contents and processes of identity development among people in their late twenties. The studies are based on identity status interviews and surveys performed with participants in the GoLD (Gothenburg Longitudinal study of Development), at ages 25 and 29. **Study I** investigated Swedish emerging adults' expectations regarding possible future parenthood through content analysis of identity status interviews with the 124 (58 women) participants who were not yet parents at age 25. Thematic analysis of the participants' interview narratives in the identity domains of parenthood and work/family priorities showed that most participants were sure they wanted to become parents, but often just not right now. First they wanted a stable financial situation, a romantic relationship, and time for self-focus. More women than men talked about parenthood as a social norm and wanted to prioritize both work and family equally. More men than women wanted to prioritize either work or family, most often family over work. The women gave more examples of how they intended to solve potential work/family conflicts. Study I thus indicated that many Swedish emerging adults postpone, but do not reject, parenthood. Moreover, the results indicate that in emerging adulthood more women than men consider these aspects of their identities. **Study II** concerned the process of identity development between ages 25 and 29 among the 124 (63 women) participants who took part in the study at both ages. The study had a special focus on how people continue to evolve their identities after making identity commitments. Each of the four identity statuses (identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and identity diffusion) was equally common at both ages. Stability in identity status was typical of individuals assigned to all statuses except moratorium. Further analysis of interview narratives from participants assigned to identity achievement or foreclosure at both interview occasions ( $n = 55$ ), showed that relevant processes of continued identity development after commitments have been made are: the ways in which people approach changing life conditions, the extent to which they continue to engage in meaning making, and how they continue to develop their personal life direction. Identity achievement was connected to a deepening of the identity narrative on all three dimensions, whereas developmental patterns connected to foreclosure were more diverse. Study II thus showed how identity development continues in the late twenties, also beyond identity achievement. Moreover, the study indicated that further evolution might be a key process through which an established sense of identity can stay adaptive and flexible. **Study III** compared two models commonly used to study identity development, the identity status model and the dual-cycle model, among the 123 (62 women) participants who completed both measures at age 29. These models are based on the same theoretical framework and use the same terminology, though the associations found between them were only modest. Further, a validation of the Swedish version of the measure commonly used to study the dual-cycle model (Dimensions of Identity Development Scale; DIDS) could not confirm the processes in the model as a sufficient representation of the participants' ratings on the DIDS. The findings in this study call for a reconsideration of what the identity status terminology actually means, what the identity status interview and the DIDS actually measure, and how these models reflect people's identity development. In sum, this thesis shows some ways people may continue to evolve their identities as life unfolds. Further, the results suggest that to learn more about how people develop their identities we need to combine and evaluate different theoretical approaches and research methods, and keep an open mind regarding what people tell us about their experiences.

*Keywords:* identity development, identity processes, identity contents, emerging adulthood, young adulthood, longitudinal development, parenthood, work/family priorities

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- II. Carlsson, J., Wängqvist, M., & Frisé, A. (2015). Identity development in the late twenties: A never ending story. *Developmental Psychology*, 51, 334-345. doi: 10.1037/a0038745
- III. Carlsson, J., Wängqvist, M., & Frisé, A. *A comparison between two models of identity development: Same terminology but different processes.* (Manuscript)

# SAMMANFATTNING SWEDISH SUMMARY

Vi antar alla olika roller i skilda situationer i livet och vår bild av vem vi själva är kan därför delvis skilja sig åt mellan olika kontexter och sociala relationer. Dessutom samlar vi på oss nya erfarenheter under livets gång och vår uppfattning om vem vi är idag kan därmed skilja sig åt från den vi upplevde oss vara igår, och ofta ännu tydligare, för ett antal år sedan. Trots detta kan människor utveckla en sammanhängande upplevelse av att veta vem de är och av att vara samma person genom livets olika skeden. Detta kan också uttryckas som att man utvecklar en identitet.

Identitetsutvecklingen grundar sig i människors egna upplevelser av vilka de är, var de kommer ifrån och vad de vill göra i livet, men det är också centralt hur deras tankar om vem de själva är bemöts av andra. Därför kan man beskriva identitetsutvecklingen som en ständigt pågående integrering av personers egna upplevelser och förutsättningar, deras tidigare erfarenheter och den sociala verklighet som de befinner sig i. Man blir därför aldrig färdig med sin identitet utan identitetsutvecklingen pågår under hela livet.

I den här avhandlingen undersöks olika aspekter av identitetsutveckling hos personer i sena 20-årsåldern — en tid i livet då många går in i allt fler av de sociala roller som ofta förknippas med vuxenlivet. Exempelvis börjar många i den här åldern arbeta efter att ha studerat under flera år. Många etablerar också långsiktiga kärleksrelationer som innefattar samboskap eller äktenskap. Dessutom, får allt fler barn. Den här typen av erfarenheter, att gå in i nya sociala roller eller på annat sätt vara med om något som får en att betrakta sitt liv och sig själv i nytt ljus, kan leda till att man behöver utvärdera och omforma bilden av vem man är — och därmed omforma och utveckla den egna identiteten.

Avhandlingens övergripande mål är att undersöka olika aspekter av identitetsutveckling hos personer i sena 20-årsåldern. Avhandlingen innehåller tre delstudier som alla bygger på intervjuer med och enkätsvar från deltagare i forskningsprojektet GoLD (**G**othenburg **L**ongitudinal study of **D**evelopment). Avhandlingen tar sin utgångspunkt i Eriksons psykosociala utvecklingsteori, inom vilken identitetsutveckling är en central del. Ett sätt att beskriva identitetsutveckling med utgångspunkt i Eriksons teori är genom Marcias identitetsstatusmodell. Med hjälp av identitetsstatusmodellen undersöks om personer aktivt har utforskat olika livsriktningar och sedan tagit ställning i identitetsfrågor. Exempel på sådana frågor är vad man vill arbeta med och hur man vill att ens relationer ska se ut. Var i den här processen personer befinner sig anses sedan spegla deras identitetsutveckling. Med

utgångspunkt i processerna *utforskande* och *ställningstagande* beskriver Marcia fyra så kallade identitetsstatuspositioner: Uppnådd identitet, moratorium, för tidig identitet och diffus identitet. *Uppnådd identitet* beskriver personer som har tagit ställning i identitetsfrågor efter att först ha utforskat olika alternativ. *Moratorium* beskriver personer som just nu utforskar olika alternativ utan att ännu ha tagit ställning. *För tidig identitet* beskriver personer som har tagit ställning i olika identitetsfrågor, men utan att först utforska olika alternativ. Slutligen beskriver *diffus identitet* personer som inte har tagit ställning och som inte heller utforskar olika identitetsalternativ. I avhandlingens tre delstudier utgår jag från den syn på identitetsutveckling som förmedlas i identitetstatusmodellen. Jag använder mig också av en narrativ syn på identitetsutveckling. Inom denna teoribildning anses framförallt skapandet av en sammanhängande livsberättelse vara centralt för etableringen av en egen identitet.

I **studie I** behandlades unga vuxnas tankar om ett eventuellt framtida föräldraskap och deras tankar om prioriteringar mellan arbetsliv och familjeliv. I studien användes tematisk analys för att studera intervju svar från de 124 deltagare (58 kvinnor och 66 män) som var med i GoLD vid 25 års ålder och som vid intervjutillfället ännu inte hade några egna barn.

Resultaten visade att de flesta deltagarna ville bli föräldrar, men många tänkte sig att ett eventuellt föräldraskap låg ganska långt in i framtiden. Vanliga skäl för att de ville vänta var att de först ville ha en stabil ekonomisk situation och en stabil kärleksrelation, men också att de just nu, i 25-årsåldern, ville fokusera på sig själva. De flesta deltagarna angav också skäl till varför de ville bli föräldrar. Vanligast var skäl som handlade om att föräldraskapet var en del i den egna utvecklingen och att barn generellt sett var något roligt och trevligt. Vissa, framförallt kvinnor, uttryckte att det finns en tydlig social norm om att man ska vilja bli förälder. En del sa också att det kändes naturligt att bli förälder eller att de hade börjat känna sig inspirerade till att själva skaffa barn efter att personer i deras omgivning hade gjort det. Knappt en tredjedel av deltagarna, också här framförallt kvinnor, pratade om att det kunde finnas hinder på vägen mot ett föräldraskap, så som att de kanske inte skulle kunna bli gravida, att de kanske inte skulle hitta en lämplig partner att bli förälder tillsammans med, eller att de helt enkelt inte upplevde barnlängtan.

Angående prioriteringar mellan arbete och familj visade studien att ungefär hälften av deltagarna, framförallt män, tänkte sig att de i framtiden ville prioritera antingen familjen eller arbetet. De allra flesta av dessa deltagare sa sig vilja prioritera familjen. En mindre grupp deltagare tänkte sig att de ville prioritera en sak i taget, till exempel om de ägnade mycket tid åt arbetet nu så ville de ägna mer tid åt familjen i framtiden och vice versa. Knappt en tredjedel av deltagarna ville inte välja mellan arbete och familj utan tänkte sig att de ville prioritera båda lika högt i framtiden. Denna grupp bestod framförallt av kvinnor. Många, återigen fler kvinnor

än män, gav också exempel på hur de tänkte att de skulle kunna lösa konflikter mellan arbete och familjeliv som de skulle kunna ställas inför i framtiden. Vanligt var att föreslå praktiska lösningar som att båda föräldrarna kan hämta och lämna på förskolan eller att man kan be sina egna föräldrar om hjälp. En mindre grupp pratade också om att en lösning på konflikter mellan arbetsliv och familjeliv skulle kunna vara att samtala med sin partner eller arbetsgivare om situationen.

Sammantaget indikerade studien att de allra flesta unga vuxna tänker sig att de vill bli föräldrar i framtiden, men att detta för många inte är en central identitetsfråga just under åren som ung vuxen. Skillnaderna mellan kvinnors och mäns svar tydde också på att kvinnor i den här åldern ofta har tänkt mer på ett framtida föräldraskap och framtida prioriteringar mellan arbete och familj än vad män har gjort. Att fundera över ett framtida föräldraskap och prioriteringar mellan arbetsliv och familjeliv kan antas påverka hur man tänker om andra delar av livet. Till exempel kan ens yrkesval påverkas av om det yrke man väljer är enkelt att kombinera med familjeliv. Därför tydde studiens resultat på att i 25-årsåldern påverkas unga kvinnors, i högre grad än unga mäns, övergripande identitetsutveckling av tankar om ett framtida föräldraskap och prioriteringar mellan arbete och familj.

I **studie II** undersöktes hur personer utvecklar sin identitet mellan 25 och 29 års ålder. Studien utfördes i två steg. Först undersöktes förändring i identitetsstatus för de 124 personer (63 kvinnor och 61 män) som deltagit i GoLD vid både 25 och 29 års ålder. Resultaten visade att ungefär hälften av deltagarna kunde tillskrivas samma identitetsstatus vid båda tillfällena medan hälften bytte position. Vidare visade resultaten att för personer som bedömts befinna sig i uppnådd identitet, för tidig identitet eller diffus identitet vid 25 års ålder var den statistiskt förväntade utvecklingen att koda till samma identitetsstatus vid båda intervjutillfällena. Detta gällde inte personer som befann sig i moratorium vid 25 års ålder.

Studiens andra del utforskade vad som händer i människors identitetsutveckling efter det att de har tagit ställning i olika identitetsfrågor. Därför undersöktes hur de 55 personer som hade en etablerad identitetskänsla (uppnådd eller för tidig identitet) vid både 25 och 29 års ålder utvecklade och bibehöll sina identitetsnarrativ över tid. För att kunna undersöka utveckling på individnivå betraktades varje deltagare först som ett enskilt fall, där skillnader och likheter mellan intervju svaren vid 25 och 29 års ålder sammanfattades för varje deltagare separat. För att studera gemensamma mönster i deltagarnas utveckling gjordes sedan en tematisk analys av dessa fallsammanfattningar. Detta resulterade i en modell som beskriver identitetsutvecklingen hos personer med etablerad identitetskänsla vid både 25 och 29 års ålder. Modellen beskriver denna utveckling som en fördjupning eller försvagning av deltagarnas identitetsnarrativ i tre identitetsdimensioner: förhållningssätt till förändrade livsvillkor, meningsskapande och utveckling av den

egna livsriktningen. Personer som var kodade till uppnådd identitet vid både 25 och 29 års ålder hade i regel fördjupat sitt identitetsnarrativ inom minst två, eller alla tre dimensionerna. Identitetsutvecklingen hos personer som var kodade till för tidig identitet vid både 25 och 29 års ålder varierade mer mellan olika personer. Ingen deltagare hade försvagat sitt identitetsnarrativ på samtliga dimensioner. Försvagning i endera dimensionen var förknippad med olika typer av begränsningar i identitetsutvecklingen.

Sammantaget indikerade studie II att man fortsätter att utveckla och omforma sin identitet under sena 20-årsåldern. Detta gällde även personer som har en etablerad identitetskänsla vid både 25 och 29 års ålder. Resultaten tydde till och med på att en fortsatt utveckling kan vara nödvändig för att en persons uppnådda identitet ska förbli flexibel och funktionell.

I **studie III** gjordes en jämförelse mellan två modeller som används för att studera identitetsutveckling: identitetsstatusmodellen och dual-cycle modellen. Dual-cycle modellen har utvecklats ur identitetsstatusmodellen och bygger därför på samma teoretiska utgångspunkter (till exempel att identitetsutveckling kan studeras genom observation av personers utforskande och ställningstaganden) och använder sig också av samma teoretiska begrepp (till exempel samma namn på olika identitetsstatuspositioner). Således kan man förvänta sig att beskrivningen av en persons identitetsutveckling i de två modellerna bör överlappa till stor del.

För att undersöka i vilken utsträckning de båda modellerna beskriver samma saker jämfördes i studie III en intervju, Maricas identitetsstatusintervju, som utvecklades tillsammans med identitetstatusmodellen, och ett frågeformulär, Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS), som har utvecklats för att studera dual-cycle modellen. Studien omfattade de 123 GoLD-deltagare som vid 29 års ålder hade deltagit i intervjun och fyllt i frågeformuläret. Både intervjun och formuläret är välanvända i internationella studier av identitetsutveckling och även om de har samma teoretiska utgångspunkter skiljer de sig åt på vissa sätt. I intervjun bedöms huruvida personer just nu aktivt utforskar olika identitetsalternativ eller har en historia av att göra det, samt om de har tagit ställning inom olika identitetsfrågor (till exempel gällande vad man vill jobba med eller hur man vill att ens relation ska vara). Utifrån detta bedöms sedan personen tillhöra en av de fyra identitetstatuspositionerna som beskrivits ovan. I frågeformuläret mäts istället olika aspekter av ett pågående utforskande och ställningstagande i allmänna ordalag utan att koppla detta till någon specifik identitetskontext, så som arbete eller kärleksrelationer. Efter detta används statistiska metoder, till exempel klusteranalys, för att identifiera grupper som liknar varandra i sina skattningar utifrån olika aspekter av utforskande och ställningstagande. Dessa grupper namnges sedan enligt identitetsstatusterminologin.



Givet att frågeformuläret använder sig av samma teoretiska begrepp som intervjun, visade resultaten i studie III förvånansvärt dålig överensstämmelse mellan identitetsstatusintervjun och frågeformuläret DIDS, avseende både skattningar av identitetsprocesser (utforskande och ställningstagande) och vilka identitetsstatuspositioner som olika personer ansågs tillhöra. Dessutom tydde resultaten på att formuläret DIDS fungerar dåligt i en svensk kontext. Sammantaget indikerade studie III därmed att det behöver utredas vidare hur terminologin i identitetsstatusmodellen bör användas, vad identitetsstatusintervjun och DIDS egentligen beskriver, och hur väl detta speglar identitetsutveckling.

Sammantaget beskriver den här avhandlingen hur människors identitetsutveckling fortsätter i den sena 20-årsåldern. Denna utveckling tycks vara olika för olika personer och verkar vara relaterad till innehållet i olika identitetskontexter. Avhandlingen visar också att vi, för att lära oss mer om hur människor utvecklar sina identiteter, behöver vara beredda att kombinera och utvärdera olika teoretiska ansatser och forskningsmetoder. Framförallt måste vi fortsätta lyssna på människors berättelser om sina upplevelser.

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About a year and a half ago I told my friend Anna I had found a quote I wanted to include at the beginning of my thesis because I felt it summarized some of the things that both identity development and often also one's twenties are about. The quote came from a song by Håkan Hellström, a singer whose music is easily associated with the joys and struggles of youth. Roughly translated it reads: "You have to go through shame, you have to go through dreams, you have to die a couple of times before you can live". The problem, however, I told Anna, was that I had just realized that one of the important things in my thesis is that, even though the turbulence of youth might fade, people continue to change and evolve their identities in relation to life. So the quote would read: "You have to keep on going through shame, you have to keep on going through dreams..." — "That's what it is to live", Anna interrupted. There is no doubt that, like life in general, my writing of this thesis has involved elements of going through both struggles (even moments of shame) and dreams. Therefore, there are many people I would like to acknowledge, because it is only with their aid, encouragement, and support that the writing of this thesis has been possible.

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Göteborg, 2015

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# INTRODUCTION

“Who am I?” is an existential question with multiple answers, yet perhaps not one that is fully satisfying. People’s answers to this question change across both time and social contexts. Despite this change, people can still have a subjective experience of knowing who they are, and that this person is the same across time and in different social contexts. In other words, people can develop a sense of identity (Erikson, 1968).

Peoples’ development of a sense of identity is influenced both by their own experiences about who they are as well as by how these ideas about their own person are recognized by people in their social world. This development is typically considered to be most central during adolescence and the early twenties (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968), but it is also a lifelong process. People need to reshape their identities as they are faced with new experiences, unexpected events, and developmental challenges (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Marcia, 2002). Thus, identity development may be described as an ongoing integration of people’s individual dispositions, their life history and experiences, and the social world that surrounds them (Erikson, 1980). Identity work is therefore never finished; instead, people continue to evolve their identities throughout their lifespan.

The overall aim of this thesis was to study contents and processes of identity development among people in their late twenties. The first study concerns identity *contents* within the specific domains of parenthood and priorities between work and family. This study investigates attitudes and expectations regarding parenthood among 25-year-olds who were not yet parents, focusing on the unique cultural context in which young Swedish people develop their identities in these domains. The second study concerns the *processes* of identity development with a special focus on how people, after having made identity commitments, maintain and continue to evolve their identities between the ages of 25 and 29. The third study compares two models that are commonly used to study identity development and that originate from the same theoretical framework: the identity status model and the dual-cycle model.

This thesis begins with a short overview of theories on people’s development in their twenties and a discussion of the culturally specific conditions for Swedish young people’s development. This is followed by a description of theory and previous research on identity development, relevant for the studies included in this thesis. After this, a summary of the results from the three studies is presented, followed by a general discussion of the results.

# THE TWENTIES

All development occurs within social, cultural, and historical contexts. People's identity development is thus dependent not only on their personal experiences and life history, but also on the cultural and social norms that characterize their surroundings (Erikson, 1975). This thesis concerns identity development in the mid- and late twenties, when many young people can be expected to transition from the temporary and instable social roles that commonly characterize the early and mid-twenties (Arnett, 2006) into the more long-term social roles of adulthood. Characteristics of this developmental period are described in the section below, with special attention to the Swedish social context. Research on young people's views regarding future parenthood and priorities between work and family are also described, since this was the specific focus of Study I in this thesis.

## A prolonged transition to adulthood

Traditional markers of adulthood include leaving home, finishing school, finding work, getting married, and starting a family (Furstenberg, Rumbaut, & Settersten, 2005). In today's Western world many young individuals are achieving these markers increasingly late in life, and not everyone embraces all these normative milestones (Arnett, 2006). It has been suggested that Sweden, in many ways, is a society where this prolonged transition to adulthood may be considered normative (Ferrer-Wreder, Trost, Lorente, & Mansoor, 2012). For example, young people in Sweden establish themselves on the labor market later today than 25 years ago (Swedish National Board of Youth Affairs, 2013). This may be connected to the fact that a large proportion of young individuals attend postsecondary education; national statistics show that 44% of all Swedish people born in 1987 had begun university education by age 24 (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2013). However, the unemployment rate is also substantially higher among young people than in the rest of the population (Statistics Sweden, 2014a), and time-limited employment contracts are more common among young people than in other age groups (Statistics Sweden, 2014b). It thus appears that, in relation to extended education and an insecure labor market, many young Swedish people are often, and to various extents, financially dependent on their parents or society at higher ages than previously.

Apart from the demographic changes connected to young people's delay of the transition to adulthood, it has also been argued that this phenomenon is connected to an idealization of youth in contemporary society (Jacobsson, 2005), suggesting that when youth is an idealized period it might be less appealing for young people to proceed into adult life. In contrast, recent reports pertaining to youth from different parts of the world such as Sweden, China, Russia, Brazil, Spain and the US indicate that young people's dreams about the future often include the comforts and responsibilities of a rather traditional adult life, such as having a nice home and a good job (Kairos Future, 2013). It has been suggested that it is not that young people do not want to become adults at all, but that they just do not want to become adults too early (Arnett, 2006). Instead, young people of today often want to, and are also expected to want to, explore both their inner and outer worlds before committing to the stability of adult life.

Furthermore, what it means to be an adult in today's society is diverse and no longer obvious. Research shows that young people's views of what it means to be an adult are more complex than that of achieving a number of traditional markers of adult life (e.g., Arnett, 2001; Nelson & Barry, 2005). Instead, both Swedish and international studies show that, when asked what makes a person an adult, young people often refer to individual, subjective markers of adulthood that are developed gradually (Arnett, 2001; Westberg, 2004; Wängqvist & Frisé, in press). The highest rated markers in these studies include elements of taking responsibility for one's own actions, making independent decisions, and achieving financial independence. Moreover, becoming less self-oriented and developing greater consideration for others were also rated high in one Swedish study (Wängqvist & Frisé, in press). Thus, it may be argued that accepting responsibility for one's own actions also involves accepting the responsibilities one has towards others. Despite this focus on subjective markers, findings also show that individuals who have achieved all the traditional markers of adulthood, especially those who have had children, are more likely to report feeling entirely like adults than individuals who have not reached as many of these traditional milestones (Shanahan, Porfeli, Mortimer, & Erickson, 2005). In sum, it may thus be suggested that the experience of adulthood is a combination of traditional, normative milestones and individualistic, subjective markers of adulthood. Moreover, it does not appear that young people in general dismiss either the intrapersonal or interpersonal responsibilities of adulthood, but rather that it often takes them some time to get there.

## Emerging adulthood

In relation to the prolonged transition to adulthood, the late teens and twenties have been described as a separate developmental period, called *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000, 2006). Emerging adulthood was first described in a North American context, but the main characteristics of the time period have appeared relevant for young people in large parts of the world, including Europe and Sweden (Arnett, 2011; Douglass, 2007). Originally, emerging adulthood was roughly defined as ages 18 to 25 years (Arnett, 2000). However, the duration of the developmental period shows great variation, between both individuals and cultures (Arnett, 2011). Thus, the duration age of 18 to 29 years has been suggested as sometimes being more accurate (e.g., Arnett, 2012; Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014). Five main characteristics of the time period have been described: *identity exploration*, *instability*, *self-focus*, *feeling in-between*, and *lots of possibilities*.

A first characteristic of the emerging adult years is identity exploration, which will be described more thoroughly in a later section (page 13), as it is part of the main focus of this thesis. During emerging adulthood, identity exploration entails young people figuring out what they want for themselves in life, especially in the areas of love and work (Arnett, 2006). The emerging adult years provide opportunities for this exploration, because most emerging adults still have not made many of the long-term commitments related to, for example, a stable job or having children. Further, in comparison with adolescents, emerging adults can explore opportunities and different social roles more independent of their parents' influence. The exploration that characterizes the emerging adulthood years conjoins with the fact that it is an intense and unstable time period, during which many young people are constantly revising their life plans. Thus, instability itself is considered a second characteristic of this time period. During emerging adulthood, young people are also largely alone in their decision-making as they often do not have daily contact with a family context, either their family of origin or a future family. Thus, a third characteristic of this developmental period is that it is a time of self-focus (Arnett, 2006). In relation to this, Twenge and colleagues have argued that young people are more narcissistic and selfish than ever before (Twenge, 2006; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). This finding, however, has been questioned by other researchers (e.g., Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010); furthermore, the theory of emerging adulthood entails that the self-focus will pass as the young person moves into adult life and should thus not be confused with selfishness.

When asked if they feel like adults, most emerging adults feel they are adults in some respects, but not in other ones (Arnett, 2000). This ambiguity appears to decline with age, and most young people approaching 30 define themselves as



adults. A feeling of being in-between (adolescence and adulthood) is thus considered a fourth characteristic of emerging adulthood.

A last characteristic that describes emerging adulthood is that it is considered to be an age of possibilities. Today, many young people have great opportunity to choose what they want their adult life to be about, and during their emerging adult years many of these choices have yet to be made. However, this focus on possibilities and choices has also been the subject of criticism regarding the theory of emerging adulthood. These critics propose that the description of emerging adulthood only applies to certain (rather privileged) groups of young people who have the luxury of spending a number of years exploring their possibilities and focusing on their own lives — excluding those who, for example, already in their late teens have to provide financially for others (e.g., Hendry & Kloep, 2007). Moreover, the possibility to freely choose one's lifestyle is relative, since norms and traditions strongly influence people's lifestyle choices. For example, North American research shows that individuals who engage in higher education and more personal exploration, and thus postpone many of the traditional markers of adulthood, are likely to come from families of higher social class (Osgood, Ruth, Eccles, Jacobs, & Barber, 2005) and have higher educated parents (Oesterle, Hawkins, Hill, & Bailey, 2010) than individuals who marry and have children in their early twenties. Even so, it could be argued that although the possibilities of emerging adulthood are not equal for all young people, young people with smaller possibilities for exploration and self-focus might also relate to the cultural image of young people as described in the theory of emerging adults, and to how their own lives correspond or deviate from this image.

## Expectations on family life

Along with the delay of most traditional markers of adulthood, the age of first-time parents has increased throughout the industrial and post-industrial world (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2010), and American research suggests that emerging adults have a “Yes, but not yet” attitude towards parenthood (Arnett, 2006). In Sweden, the mean age of first-time mothers and fathers has increased by three years since 1985 — in 2013 it was 29 years for mothers and 32 years for fathers (Statistics Sweden, 2014c).

## The Swedish socio-cultural context

It has been suggested that although Sweden may be perceived as an individualistic country, Swedish culture also strongly emphasizes equality and common welfare (Ferrer-Wreder et al., 2012). Berggren and Trädgårdh (2006) describe this paradox

as an individualism that is heavily dependent on a strong state; by recognizing and depending on the welfare state, individuals may obtain maximal personal autonomy from traditional obligations both to people close to them, such as their families, and to fellow citizens who may be less fortunate. Because of this supportive yet individualistic social structure, it is possible that Swedish society exerts a contextual influence on young people's lives that is culturally fairly unique.

The Swedish welfare system includes, for example, tax-financed health care at low cost and free education at all levels. Moreover, Sweden is often considered one of the world's most gender-equal countries (World Economic Forum, 2014), and the ideological notion of gender equality is deeply imbedded in the Swedish cultural identity (Towns, 2002). In accordance with this, a radical family ideal, whereby women and men share equal responsibility for labor and domestic work as well as the care of children, has been highly influential in forming Swedish social policy (Björnberg, 2000). For example, both women and men have access to a generous parental leave system when they become parents (Haas & Hwang, 2008): When a child is born, parents receive 480 days of paid parental leave. By default, 240 days are allotted to each parent, but the parents can also transfer days between themselves. Sixty days are, however, reserved for each parent and cannot be transferred. When parents return to paid work, families receive public childcare at a low cost. It is likely that the welfare benefits related to having children, as well as the radical family ideal, will affect Swedish young people's development of a parental identity, their views on future parenthood, and their future work/family priorities. For example, it has been shown that young people in the Nordic countries expect public support when they become parents and feel more entitled to it, compared to young people from other parts of Europe (S. Lewis & Smithson, 2001).

It is critical to note, however, that despite the influence of the radical family ideal on political efforts toward increased gender equality, the conditions for women and men in Sweden still differ. Swedish women earn lower wages than Swedish men, and women spend more time on domestic work and childcare than men do, even though more women than men graduate from college and university (Statistics Sweden, 2014c). Men, on the other hand, spend more time on paid work than women do. Regarding parenthood, studies show that Swedish mothers and fathers experience it differently and that people expect different things from mothers and fathers, in both private and professional life (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001; Kugelberg, 2006). For example, the majority of large Swedish companies are not supportive of fathers taking parental leave when they have a child (Haas & Hwang, 2009), while mothers are expected to take several months or even a year of leave. In the end, fathers use only 24% of the parental leave (Försäkringskassan, 2012), even though the default distribution is to split it equally between the parents. This shows that there is a contrast between the culturally embedded idea of gender equality and

everyday practice in Swedish families and workplaces. Swedish emerging adults thus form their identities and expectations for a future family life “within the context of a gender-equality discourse, but in an everyday reality that is not gender equal” (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001, p. 410).

## Emerging adulthood and parenthood

National statistics show that most young people in Sweden want to become parents in the future. However, almost 40% of the young women (20–27 years old) and young men (20–29 years old) stated that they wanted to achieve other things first, when asked why they had not had children yet (Statistics Sweden, 2009a). Some also stated that they did not feel mature enough, or that they needed to improve their financial situation before having children. An interview study with 40 highly educated women and men in their mid-twenties to late thirties also shows that Swedes view their postponement of parenthood as a consequence of the contemporary lifestyle, especially in big cities, and of a dominant social discourse which suggests that early parenthood is unfavorable (Eriksson, Larsson, Skoog Svanberg, & Tydén, 2013). Further, a large-scale questionnaire study of Swedish university students investigated which conditions they wanted to be fulfilled before having children (Lampic, Svanberg, Karlström, & Tydén, 2006). Conditions the students rated as important included being in a long-term relationship, having a partner, feeling mature enough, having a completed education, and having a stable financial situation. Some conditions were of greater concern for female than male students. For example, a stable financial situation, a job that would be possible to combine with caring for children, and access to childcare were considered more important by the women than the men. This is in line with previous international results that indicate that young women tend to rate the costs and personal sacrifices of parenting higher than young men do (O’Laughlin & Anderson, 2001). However, the Swedish university students generally thought that becoming a parent would have a positive effect on their own self-development (Lampic et al., 2006).

Three small interview studies – two including respectively nine and ten young adult Swedish women without children (Söderberg, Christensson, & Lundgren, 2012; Söderberg, Lundgren, Olsson, & Christensson, 2011) and one including eight pregnant Norwegian women (Ravn, 2005) – showed that women often regard having children as a natural and meaningful part of a woman’s life. These studies also found that, among women, childbearing and becoming a parent could be part of the personal self-actualization process, an actual life goal (Ravn, 2005; Söderberg et al., 2011). Some of the young women viewed the childbearing process as part of a female identity (Söderberg et al., 2012; Söderberg et al., 2011), but they also emphasized that it was important to enjoy freedom before having children (Söderberg et al., 2011).

In sum, the existing research on emerging adults' expectations regarding parenthood indicate that young people from Sweden and Norway, especially young women, tend to view future parenthood as natural and self-developing, even though certain conditions are to be fulfilled before entering parenthood. However, most previous research from Sweden and Norway has focused exclusively on female or highly educated participants. This means that expectations on possible future parenthood for large groups of young Swedes are still unexamined. It is possible that these expectations partly differ between the group that has been studied and other parts of the Swedish population. For example, national statistics indicate that people with a postsecondary education tend to become parents later than those without (Statistics Sweden, 2012), which may impact the expectations regarding parenthood in the different groups.

### Emerging adulthood and work/family priorities

The way people handle work/family priorities is influenced by national cultures, political changes, and new and old welfare policies (Wall, 2007). Because of the strong dual-breadwinning norm in Sweden, in most families both parents have to prioritize and divide their time between work and family activities. People's priorities are, however, also influenced by other factors, such as their own ideas about what is best for their family, their personal networks and extended families, as well as the company culture in their workplaces (Guerreiro & Pereira, 2007).

A questionnaire study of Swedish university students indicated that female students were more concerned than male students about the negative effect parenthood might have on their careers (Lampic et al., 2006). Furthermore, a study of Finnish women in their late teens indicated that for these young women motherhood was a complex issue, in relation to the gender inequalities in parenthood and work/family conflict (Gordan & Lahelma, 2004). Other than this, no Scandinavian studies focusing on emerging adults' own reasoning about future work/family conflict and potential solutions have been found. Thus, international research from Australia (Arthur & Lee, 2008; Thompson & Lee, 2011) and North America (Gerson, 2010) will be discussed as a background for Study I.

A thematic analysis of an open-ended question whereby 399 Australian young men were asked to describe their imagined fatherhood showed that the role conflict that young Australian men expected was mainly between being a teaching, loving, and involved father and being a financial provider (Thompson & Lee, 2011). However, few of these young men had articulated strategies for how they were going to solve this conflict. Among those who addressed it, most stated that they wanted to prioritize the family or avoid becoming consumed by work. Only a few mentioned more progressive strategies, such as working from home or working part-time. In a smaller interview study including 13 female university students, most of

the women had a rather traditional view on work/family priorities (Arthur & Lee, 2008). Most of them wanted to work part-time, and did not expect to experience much work/family conflict. Moreover, they expected their husbands to be the main financial providers and to play a significant, but secondary, role in the domestic and childcare responsibilities. Thus, these young women's view on their future work/family life was highly dependent on a future partner.

In an interview study of 120 young North Americans living in the New York metropolitan area, Gerson (2010) found that most young women (80%) and men (70%) stated that they wanted to live in an egalitarian relationship. However, the women and men had different backup plans for how to solve difficulties in accomplishing this. If their attempts to live in an egalitarian relationship failed, most of the men indicated that they would prefer to fall back into a traditional work/family pattern, with a male breadwinner and a female caregiver. For the majority of women, however, this was not an appealing option; instead, they indicated that they would apply a self-reliant strategy: they would take care of themselves and, because most of them wanted to have children, become single parents if they had to. These results indicate that as long as both parents work, any mother (both those in egalitarian relationships and those in traditional relationships) has to deal with work/family conflicts. For men, dealing with these conflicts appears to be more optional, especially in a traditional relationship.

Although both the North American and Australian studies on work/family priorities and gender equality in emerging adults are of interest, the social policies in these countries are very different from those in Sweden. Little research attention has been given to what young people from Sweden expect from, and how they plan to handle, future work/family conflict. Moreover, the limited Swedish research that does deal with these issues focuses exclusively on university students.

## Continued development at the end of emerging adulthood

As young people approach their thirties, increasing numbers of them will start identifying themselves as adults (Arnett, 2000) and many will start taking on more of the traditional markers of adulthood. In doing so, young people will face new demands on their social roles, often most apparent in love and work. Compared with emerging adults, people in their late twenties and early thirties often have more long-term jobs, with more responsibilities. Many also start their own families at this age. Thus, it has been suggested that young people often move into a time of role immersion when approaching their thirties (Arnett, 2012). During this time they become more focused on actually living their adult roles rather than defining them or exploring different possibilities.

According to Erikson's (1950, 1968, 1980) theory of individuals' development across the lifespan, which will be described in more detail in the next section, the main focus of young people's psychosocial development is expected to shift as they enter young adulthood, from identity formation to intimacy and then, later, generativity. After identity, the formation of intimate relationships is expected to be the focus of development. Such relationships are possible between both romantic partners and friends, and are described as characterized by a long-term commitment involving openness and mutual trust as well as interpersonal closeness, but without the fear of losing one's individual self (Kroger, 2015; Orlofsky, 1993). Intimacy is followed by a focus on generativity, which involves giving back to society, including caring for and mentoring the next generation (Erikson, 1980).

Although Erikson considered a certain developmental task to be in focus at each life stage, the development of both former and subsequent stages was also expected to be affected in any given developmental conflict. For example, theoretically, Erikson (1968) suggested that the development of a coherent sense of identity needs to precede the development of intimacy and, later, generativity. Even so, the creation of intimacy with another person also requires individuals to think about their identities in relation to the other person's values and interests. In line with this, from the findings in a meta-analysis of research on the relationship between identity and intimacy it may be argued that rather than identity development always preceding the capacity for intimacy, especially among women, the development of a coherent sense of identity and intimate relationships often interact and amplify each other (Årseth, Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2009). In turn, generative issues may also interfere with the creation of intimacy. For example, people often need to coordinate their aspirations for future potentially generative parts of life (e.g., future parenthood, work plan, and priorities between work and family) with a romantic partner's aspirations for similar things (Shulman & Connolly, 2013).

It may be suggested that because of the prolonged transition to adulthood that has emerged in recent decades (e.g., Arnett, 2000, 2006) and the diversity of how people live their adult lives today, the sequence of the developmental tasks of identity, intimacy, and generativity may have become increasingly mixed up, developing in a more parallel way. However, it may also be argued that there are still common routes for development and social norms regarding the sequence and time in which people are more or less expected to take on different adult responsibilities. Thus, it may be suggested that even though the basic order of Erikson's life stages could still serve as a broad sketch of how new areas often become the main focus of people's psychosocial development as they enter adulthood, for the individual person the stages of adulthood may be mixed up, reoccurring, or stretched out over the course of adulthood.

# IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The general aim of this thesis was to further the understanding of identity development by studying contents and processes of identity development among people in their late twenties. The section below contains a description of theory and previous research on identity development, starting with an introduction to Erikson's theory of identity development (Erikson, 1950, 1968, 1980) and Marcia's identity status model (Marcia, 1966; Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993). After this, theory and research on processes of identity development are presented, including the identity status model, the dual-cycle model of identity formation (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006; Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008), and the narrative approach to identity development (e.g., McAdams, 2001). This is followed by a section concerning theory and research on identity contents and the salience of different identity domains. Last, theory and previous research on identity development post emerging adulthood are discussed.

## Erikson's theory of identity across the lifespan

Erikson's (1950, 1968, 1980) theory of individuals' development across the lifespan provides the starting point for much of the psychological research on identity development. In this theory, Erikson (1950) applies a psychosocial perspective to human development, meaning that individual development occurs in the intersection between people's social context and their psychological and biological development. From this perspective, identity is described as a subjective experience of continuity and sameness, which is also recognized by significant people in a person's life (Erikson, 1968). Thus, having a sense of identity provides the individual with a feeling of being the same person across both time and different areas of life, such as family and work.

From a developmental perspective, Erikson (1968) described the formation of a sense of identity as the main psychosocial task of adolescence. Thus, in his model for psychosocial development across the lifespan, the conflict of identity versus identity confusion is placed directly between the four developmental conflicts of childhood (trust versus mistrust in infancy, autonomy versus shame and doubt in early childhood, initiative versus guilt in play age, and industry versus inferiority in school age) and the three developmental conflicts of adulthood (intimacy versus

isolation in young adulthood, generativity versus self-absorption in adulthood, and integrity versus despair in mature age) (Erikson, 1968, 1980). Each of these conflicts represents a critical developmental period in which a certain amount of instability is necessary for development to occur; but this instability also entails a risk for developmental problems. The resolution of a developmental conflict is described as finding a balance between the two endpoints of the stage conflicts, whereby the positive endpoint outweighs the negative one. However, the resolution of any past conflict may need to be reworked later in life, and although a specific conflict is in focus at each developmental stage Erikson (1980) emphasized that all the developmental conflicts included in the model are present in some form at any given time across the life course. That is, all developmental conflicts include elements of past conflict resolutions and of conflicts that have not yet been the main focus of development. Because this thesis focuses on the specific developmental conflict of identity development, a brief overview of how identity develops across Erikson's lifespan model is described below.

During childhood people playfully try out identifications with many different people and characters, such as parents, siblings, teachers, and fictional figures. Then, in adolescence, social changes involving increased demands on the individual's ability to choose between different life paths, make responsible decisions, and gradually take on adult social roles coincide with cognitive development, an increased desire for autonomy, and biological changes related to puberty (Marcia, 2007). In relation to these new demands and opportunities, people need to sort through and rearrange their childhood identifications with roles and values that have been presented to them by, for example, their parents and others close to them — keeping some identifications and letting go of others (Erikson, 1968). Through this process, people transform their childhood identifications into a coherent sense of identity.

Identity development in adolescence often involves a time of identity crisis, or what Erikson (1968) called a psychosocial moratorium: a prolonged period of role experimentation that adolescents engage in to find roles in society that fit them. During a moratorium, young people often question the validity of the culture and society in which they participate. Still, most people's moratorium activities stay within the lines of what is considered culturally accepted behavior for young people. The duration and intensity of a moratorium also differ between individuals, depending on individual resources and access to different opportunities, as well as cultural values (Erikson, 1968). Identity formation, however, is not simply the result of active role-seeking and conscious decisions. Rather, individuals evolve their sense of identity gradually through the ongoing integration of different aspects such as personal characteristics, life experiences, and opportunities or demands provided by their social context (Erikson, 1968).



As individuals enter adulthood, Erikson (1980) argues, new developmental tasks of intimacy and later generativity will be the prime focus of development. However, young adulthood is also a time of identity consolidation, as young people need to actualize and negotiate their identity decisions in relation to the social realities of adult life, such as work, intimate relationships, and having children (Pals, 1999). Moreover, all developmental conflicts of adulthood will also include elements of identity development, and people's solution to the identity conflicts will also affect their solutions to the developmental crisis in adulthood (Erikson, 1968). That is, as people face new developmental demands over their life course they may need to reconstruct and evolve their identities in order to integrate the new experiences and social roles into their current sense of identity. In addition, Erikson's model suggests that, when encountered with the developmental tasks of adulthood, this may also create openings for people to rework unsatisfying or insufficient solutions to past developmental conflicts, such as the development of a coherent sense of identity (Marcia, 2002). Thus, Erikson (1980) argues that although identity is initially formed in adolescence, the ongoing integration and maintenance of a sense of identity continues throughout the lifespan.

## The identity status model

The identity status model (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia, 1966; Marcia et al., 1993) was developed to empirically test the validity of Erikson's theory of identity development. This model studies two observable processes that are considered to be indicators of the state of people's identity development: their *exploration* of identity alternatives, and their *commitment* to chosen directions. The exploration process involves rethinking and sorting through previous identifications and values in relation to possibilities and plans for the future, as well as seeking out information about different alternatives and trying out various social roles (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Exploration is an active process, and involves a desire to reach a decision and make identity-defining commitments (Marcia et al., 1993). The commitment process, on the other hand, describes how people make identity-defining decisions in various life contexts. This process also entails people's personal investment in, and strive to pursue, the decisions they have made (Marcia et al., 1993).

Based on the exploration and commitment processes, the identity status model describes the current state of a person's identity development as one of four identity statuses (illustrated in Figure 1; Marcia, 1966): *identity achievement*, in which the person has actively explored alternatives and made identity commitments; *moratorium*, in which the person is in the middle of exploring different alternatives and has no identity commitments; *foreclosure*, in which the person has made

identity commitments, but without ever having explored different alternatives; and *identity diffusion*, in which the person has neither explored alternatives nor made any identity commitments. Identity achievement and identity diffusion may be seen as corresponding to the endpoints of identity and identity confusion as described in Erikson's theory of identity development. The characteristics of the four statuses are described below.

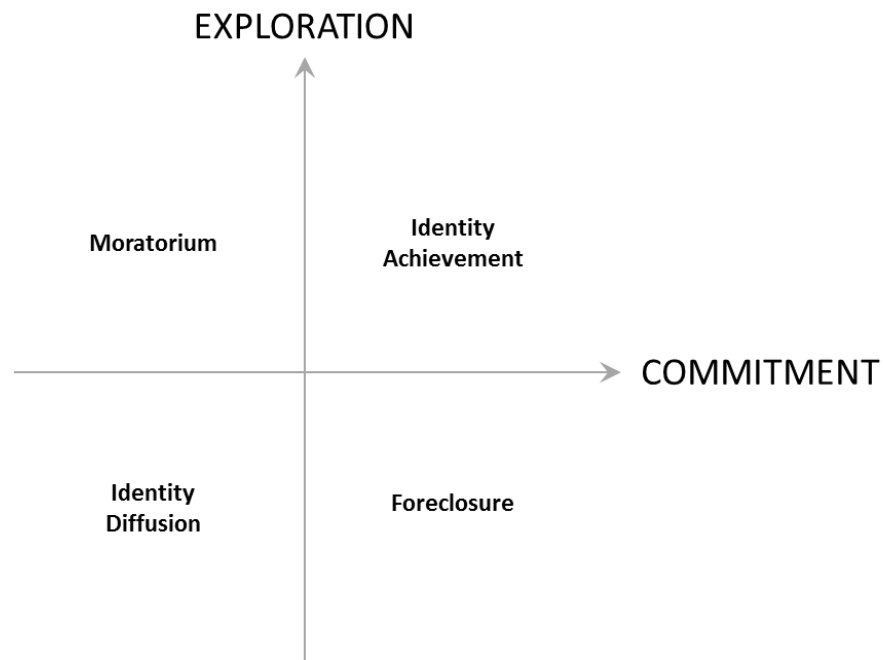


Figure 1. Illustration of the identity status model.

### Identity achievement

People who are assigned to identity achievement have explored different identity alternatives before making identity-defining commitments (Marcia et al., 1993). Because they have tried out and considered the personal meaning of different alternatives and possible roles, they may be described as having constructed their sense of identity (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). People who are assigned to this identity status are certain about their identity commitments, but also communicate flexibility and awareness that their commitments may need to change with time (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). This means that they are not easily swayed, but at the same time their commitments are not written in stone.

### Moratorium

People who are assigned to moratorium are in the middle of exploring different identity alternatives and have not yet committed to any given direction (Marcia et al., 1993). These individuals are often struggling to make decisions about who to be

and what to do in life, and are striving towards making identity-defining commitments. Thus, they are often curious about and open to new experiences; but since exploration can be a stressful process, people assigned to this status sometimes also show elevated levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms (e.g., Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca, & Ritchie, 2013). As long as this is a temporary state and not too severe, it is not necessarily considered negative for identity development. However, it has been suggested that for some people the moratorium can become a more permanent stressful state, characterized by rumination over the same identity issues over and over again (Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008).

### Foreclosure

People who are assigned to foreclosure have made identity commitments, but without ever having explored different alternatives (Marcia et al., 1993). Individuals assigned to this identity status often uncritically adopt values and commitments from their parents or other childhood role models. Moreover, their commitments often come across as more rigid than those of individuals with an achieved sense of identity and, if it is suggested to them, they often dismiss the idea that their commitment would ever change (Marcia et al., 1993). A distinction between ‘developmental’ and ‘firm’ foreclosure has been suggested (Kroger, 1995). For individuals with developmental foreclosure, this identity status is only the starting point for further identity development. These individuals are thus likely to start exploring alternatives and develop an achieved sense of identity later in life. Individuals assigned to firm foreclosure, on the other hand, are more rigid and less likely to develop their identity beyond the foreclosed identity status.

### Identity diffusion

People assigned to identity diffusion show no signs of either exploration of alternatives or identity commitments (Marcia et al., 1993). Great variation has been found among individuals assigned to identity diffusion, and several studies have suggested subcategories of this identity status (Archer & Waterman, 1990; Born, 2007; Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, & Vansteenkiste, 2005; Marcia, 1989). For example, these studies suggest differentiating between a troubled type of identity diffusion characterized by psychological distress and low well-being, commonly referred to as disturbed identity diffusion or diffused diffusion, and culturally adaptive or carefree identity types of identity diffusion in which people appear unbothered that they are not engaging in any identity exploration and commitment.

## Identity status development

In the identity status model, it is assumed that people develop their identities by moving from identity diffusion or foreclosure into an achieved sense of identity. Therefore, research on the identity status development focuses on observing changes in identity status assessment longitudinally. The theoretically suggested developmental progression is from identity diffusion via foreclosure and moratorium to identity achievement; from identity diffusion via moratorium to identity achievement; or from identity foreclosure via moratorium to identity achievement (Waterman, 1982). This assumption has been partly supported by research, as a meta-analysis of research on identity development in adolescence and young adulthood shows that, in accordance with the suggested developmental orders, the proportion of individuals who show progressive change in identity status during adolescence and young adulthood is larger than the proportion of individuals who show regressive change in identity status (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010). However, regressive patterns were also found in the meta-analysis; further, it concluded that a substantial number of individuals do not change identity status between measuring points. Individuals with an established sense of identity (identity achievement or foreclosure) were more likely to have a stable identity status over time, compared with individuals who had not yet made identity-defining commitments (moratorium or identity diffusion). These findings thus suggest that once identity commitments have been established, changes in identity status are less common than before these commitments have been made.

The practice of describing and studying identity development in terms of identity status change has been the subject of a great deal of criticism, and it has been debated whether the identity status model is at all an appropriate model for describing identity development (e.g., Côté & Levine, 1988; van Hoof, 1999; Waterman, 1988, 1999). Critics of this model have argued that because individuals are assigned to categorical identity statuses, the model only captures a snapshot of the current state of their identity (explored versus not explored; committed versus not committed) rather than the actual developmental processes through which they form and maintain their sense of identity (e.g., Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). Following this criticism, it has been suggested that rather than assessing identity statuses it is better to directly study the underlying processes of exploration and commitment, and observe longitudinal fluctuations in these processes (e.g., Meeus, 1996). Therefore, in recent years some researchers have strived to shift the focus from identity statuses to stability and change in different aspects of the exploration and commitment processes (e.g., Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008).

## The dual-cycle model of identity formation

Study III compares the identity status model with the dual-cycle model of identity formation (See Figure 2; Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, et al., 2006; Luyckx et al., 2005; Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008), which is one of the most common models for studying stability and change in different aspects of commitment and exploration. Thus, the dual-cycle model and its connection to the identity status model is explained in the sections below.

The dual-cycle model is based on the identity status model, but identifies five different processes of identity development. The first cycle in the dual-cycle model describes how people form their identities through *exploration in breadth* and *commitment making* (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006). Through the exploration in breadth process, people gather information about possible future directions or lifestyles before making identity commitments (Luyckx et al., 2005). After commitments are made, people move into the second cycle of the model. This cycle describes how people evaluate identity commitments they have made through *exploration in depth* and *identification with commitment* (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006). Through the exploration in depth process, individuals explore and evaluate the commitments they have made (Luyckx et al., 2005). Identification with commitment describes the degree to which people identify with the commitments they have made (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, et al., 2006). However, recent work has suggested that exploration in depth may in fact be comprised of two separate processes: one characterized by a careful evaluation to better understand the existing commitments, and one by a reconsideration of existing commitments that may be unsatisfying (Zimmermann, Lannegrund-Willems, Safont-Mottay, & Cannard, 2015). Luyckx and colleagues (2008) have also described an additional exploration process besides those captured by the two cycles in the dual-cycle model, which they have labeled *ruminative exploration*. This process describes how individuals can get ‘stuck’ in a ruminative state, unable or unwilling to make identity-defining commitments and continue their identity development. The dual-cycle model thus describes two processes of identity commitment and three processes of identity exploration

### Identity statuses derived from the dual-cycle model

Several studies have used the differentiated exploration and commitment processes from the dual-cycle model to describe individuals’ identity development in terms of identity statuses (e.g., Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008; Schwartz et al., 2011). In contrast to the identity status model, identity status groups are not predetermined in these studies. Instead, statistical methods are used to identify groups of individuals who, within their group, display a similar scoring pattern on the processes measured

in the dual-cycle model. The groups' scoring patterns are then interpreted and named based on identity status theory.

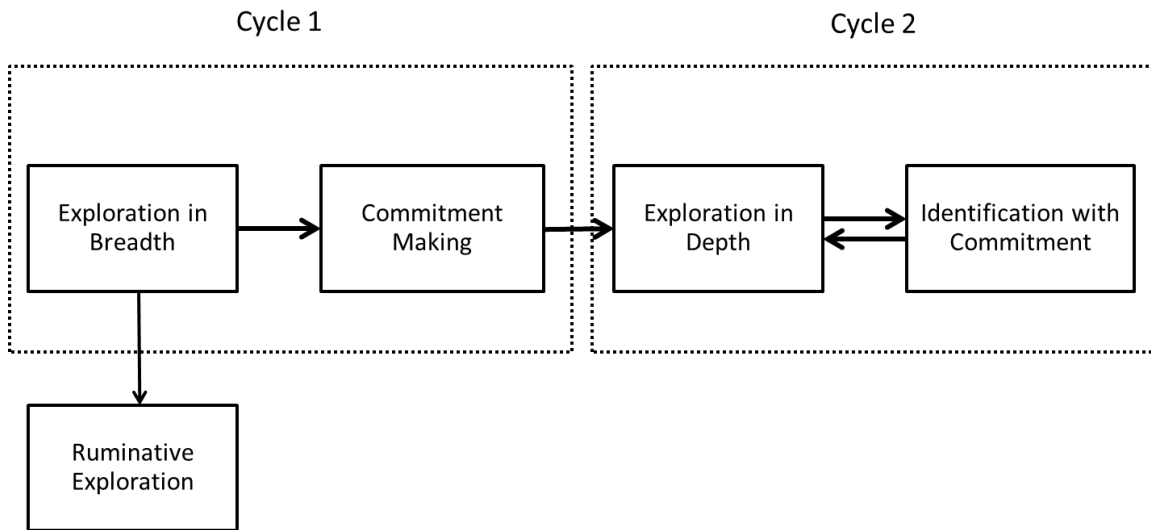


Figure 2. Illustration of the dual-cycle model of identity formation.

In studies that derive identity statuses from the dual-cycle processes in this way, groups of individuals have been identified in identity statuses that have been named *achievement*, *foreclosure*, and *moratorium*, alongside two kinds of identity diffusion: *diffused diffusion* and *carefree diffusion*. Because the status groups are derived from the data and not theoretically predetermined, the scoring pattern of each cluster, and what are considered high and low scores on the different processes, is relative to the mean score in the specific group under study. This limits the possibility to compare cluster solutions between studies. However, through an observation of standard scores, an overview of studies deriving identity status clusters from the processes measured in the dual-cycle model shows that the characteristics of the groups considered to have the same identity status are a bit different in the various studies. This is illustrated in Table 1.

While all identity statuses show some variation between different studies, some show more inconsistency than others. The pattern called *achievement* shows high consistency between studies, and is generally characterized by high levels of both types of commitments (i.e., commitment making and identification with commitment) and exploration in both breadth and depth, but low levels of ruminative exploration. However, there are inconsistencies: among French adolescents and emerging adults, a pattern with only intermediate levels of exploration in depth is called *achievement* (Zimmermann et al., 2015); and among Italian adolescents and emerging adults, a pattern with intermediate levels of ruminative exploration is called *achievement* (Cicognani, Klimstra, & Goossens,

2014; Crocetti, Luyckx, Scrignaro, & Sica, 2011). The pattern called foreclosure is also partly inconsistent between studies. The general characteristics of the foreclosure status are high levels of both types of commitment and low levels of all three kinds of exploration. However, with the exception of commitment making, different studies have accepted patterns with intermediate levels of any other process as foreclosure. Moreover, in one study all processes in a pattern called foreclosure were close to the overall sample mean (Luyckx, Goossens, Van Damme, & Moons, 2011), and in another study the pattern called foreclosure showed high levels of exploration in breadth (Zimmermann et al., 2015). This is problematic, as the main characteristics of the foreclosure status in identity status theory are high scores on commitment and *low* scores on exploration.

In studies in which identity statuses are derived from the dual-cycle model, patterns called moratorium have been characterized by high levels on all kinds of exploration, with only one exception (Cicognani et al., 2014). However, the levels of commitment in the scoring patterns called moratorium have differed between low and high in different studies, and therefore different kinds of moratoriums have been suggested. A scoring pattern with high levels of commitment making and identification with commitment has been referred to as *searching moratorium* (Schwartz et al., 2011). This pattern has only been identified among North American emerging adults (Schwartz et al., 2011; Schwartz, Kim, et al., 2013). On the other hand, patterns with low to intermediate levels on the commitment processes are sometimes, but not always, referred to as *ruminative moratorium* (Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008). Moreover, some of these studies (e.g., Luyckx, Seiffge-Krenke, et al., 2008) also show somewhat elevated levels of both commitment processes, which make the difference between various kinds of moratoriums less distinctive. Nor is the distinction between moratorium and the first type of identity diffusion, diffused diffusion, entirely clear. In all studies, patterns called diffused diffusion are characterized by low levels on both commitment processes and high levels of ruminative exploration (in Cicognani et al., 2014 only somewhat elevated). However, their levels of exploration in both breadth and depth differ between low and somewhat elevated, and in one study even high levels of exploration in depth (Zimmermann et al., 2015). Thus, a diffused diffusion with somewhat elevated levels of exploration is not that different from a moratorium with low levels of both types of commitment processes.

The process pattern of the second type of identity diffusion identified when identity statuses are derived from the dual-cycle model, carefree diffusion, is more consistent across studies. This status is most often characterized by low levels on all processes, except for ruminative exploration, which varies between low and intermediate, and in one study is even somewhat elevated (Zimmermann et al., 2015). However, in some studies the pattern called carefree diffusion showed more

intermediate or even somewhat elevated levels of the commitment processes, especially commitment making (e.g., Luyckx, Duriez, Klimstra, & De Witte, 2010; Zimmermann et al., 2015). In addition to these five statuses, many studies using the dual-cycle model identify a group of people with moderate levels on all, or almost all, identity processes, called an undefined identity status. In sum, it may thus be concluded that although different studies identify the same identity statuses, the scoring patterns of the participant groups with the same names vary between studies. This is especially apparent for the statuses foreclosure, moratorium, and diffused diffusion.

### Comparing the dual-cycle model and the identity status model

As shown in previous sections, the dual-cycle model is based on the identity status model; even so, validations between these models are scant. To my knowledge, Study III will be the first to compare people's scores from the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS), the survey measure developed in conjunction with the dual-cycle model (Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008), with their identity development as studied with the Ego Identity Status Interview (Marcia, 1966; Marcia et al., 1993). This interview was developed together with the identity status model, and among identity status measures it is the one considered to give the most accurate indication of the underlying structure of an individual's identity development, in terms of identity status (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia, 2007).

Previously, two studies (Luyckx et al., 2005; Zimmermann et al., 2015) have validated the DIDS against the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995). The EIPQ is a survey measure based on the identity status model, but only shows moderate agreement with identity status as assessed with the identity status interview (exact agreement 18/30, 60%, with a Kappa of .47; Balistreri et al., 1995). The results from the studies comparing the DIDS and the EIPQ suggest that there are only moderate associations between identity development as studied with the identity status model and the dual-cycle model. That is, the first study showed small to moderate correlations between exploration and commitment as measured with the EIPQ and the corresponding processes measured with the DIDS (Zimmermann et al., 2015). Moreover, EIPQ exploration showed small positive correlations with both commitment processes in the DIDS, whereas EIPQ commitment showed small negative correlations with both ruminative exploration and reconsideration aspects of exploration in depth as well as a small positive correlation with evaluative aspects of exploration in depth, and was uncorrelated with exploration in breadth. The second study showed that individuals' identity status also differed significantly depending on whether the identity status model processes (i.e., exploration and commitment) or the dual-cycle model processes (i.e., exploration in breadth, exploration in depth, commitment making,



Table 1. Scoring Patterns Characterizing the Different Identity Statuses in Studies Deriving Identity Status from the DIDS

|  | Achievement |    |    |    |    | Foreclosure |    |    |    |    | Moratorium |    |    |    |    | Diffused diffusion |    |    |    |    | Carefree diffusion |    |    |    |    | Undefined |    |    |    |    |
|--|-------------|----|----|----|----|-------------|----|----|----|----|------------|----|----|----|----|--------------------|----|----|----|----|--------------------|----|----|----|----|-----------|----|----|----|----|
|  | CM          | IC | EB | ED | RE | CM          | IC | EB | ED | RE | CM         | IC | EB | ED | RE | CM                 | IC | EB | ED | RE | CM                 | IC | EB | ED | RE | CM        | IC | EB | ED | RE |
| Luyckx,<br>Schwartz et<br>al., 2008<br><i>Sample 1<sup>a</sup></i>   | H           | H  | H  | H  | L  | H           | H  | L  | L  | L  | M-         | L  | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | M  | M- | H  | M-                 | L  | L  | L  | M- | M         | M  | H  | M+ | M  |
| Luyckx,<br>Schwartz et<br>al., 2008<br><i>Sample 2<sup>a</sup></i>   | H           | H  | H  | H  | L  | H           | M+ | L  | M- | L  | M          | M+ | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | M  | M  | H  | L                  | L  | L  | L  | M- | M         | M  | M  | M  | M  |
| Luyckx,<br>Seiffge-<br>Krenke et al.,<br>2008 <sup>b</sup>           | H           | H  | H  | H  | L  | H           | H  | L  | L  | L  | M+         | M+ | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | M+ | M+ | H  | L                  | L  | L  | L  | M  | M         | M  | M  | M  | M  |
| Luyckx,<br>Vansteenkiste,<br>Gossens, &<br>Duriez, 2009 <sup>a</sup> | H           | H  | H  | H  | L  | H           | H  | M  | M  | L  | M+         | M+ | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | M  | M  | H  | L                  | L  | L  | L  | M- | M         | M  | M  | M  | M  |
| Luyckx et al.,<br>2010 <sup>c</sup>                                  | H           | H  | H  | H  | L  | H           | H  | L  | M- | L  | M          | M  | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | M+ | M  | H  | M-                 | L  | L  | L  | M- | -         | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| Crocetti et al.,<br>2011 <sup>d</sup>                                | H           | H  | H  | H  | M  | H           | H  | M- | M  | L  | M-         | M  | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | M- | L  | H  | M-                 | L  | L  | L  | L  | M         | M  | M  | M  | M  |
| Schwartz et<br>al., 2011 <sup>e</sup>                                | H           | H  | H  | H  | L  | H           | H  | L  | L  | L  | H          | H  | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | M+ | M  | H  | L                  | L  | L  | L  | M  | M         | M  | M  | M  | M  |
| Luyckx et al.,<br>2011<br><i>Sample 1<sup>a</sup></i>                | H           | H  | H  | H  | L  | M+          | M  | M- | M  | M  | M          | M+ | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | M  | L  | H  | L                  | L  | L  | L  | L  | -         | -  | -  | -  | -  |

|   | Achievement |    |    |    |    | Foreclosure |    |    |    |    | Moratorium |    |    |    |    | Diffused diffusion |    |    |    |    | Carefree diffusion |    |    |    |    | Undefined |    |    |    |    |    |
|---|-------------|----|----|----|----|-------------|----|----|----|----|------------|----|----|----|----|--------------------|----|----|----|----|--------------------|----|----|----|----|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|
|   | CM          | IC | EB | ED | RE | CM          | IC | EB | ED | RE | CM         | IC | EB | ED | RE | CM                 | IC | EB | ED | RE | CM                 | IC | EB | ED | RE | CM        | IC | EB | ED | RE |    |
| Luyckx et al., 2011<br><i>Sample 2<sup>f</sup></i>    | H           | H  | H  | H  | L  | M+          | M+ | M  | M- | M- | M          | M  | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | L  | L  | H  | L                  | L  | L  | L  | L  | -         | -  | -  | -  | -  |    |
| Schwarz, Kim et al., 2013 <sup>g</sup>                | H           | H  | H  | H  | L  | H           | H  | L  | L  | L  | H          | H  | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | M+ | M  | H  | L                  | L  | L  | L  | M  | M         | M  | M  | M  | M  | M+ |
| Cicognani et al., 2014<br><i>Sample 1<sup>d</sup></i> | H           | H  | H  | H  | M+ | H           | H  | M  | M  | L  | M          | M  | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | M  | L  | H  | L                  | L  | L  | L  | L  | M-        | M  | M- | M+ | M  |    |
| Cicognani et al., 2014<br><i>Sample 2<sup>a</sup></i> | H           | H  | H  | H  | L  | M+          | M+ | L  | L  | L  | M-         | M- | H  | M  | H  | L                  | L  | L  | M- | M+ | L                  | L  | L  | L  | L  | -         | -  | -  | -  | -  |    |
| Zimmerman et al., 2015<br><i>Sample 1<sup>h</sup></i> | H           | H  | H  | M  | L  | H           | H  | L  | L  | L  | M+         | M+ | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | M+ | H  | H  | L                  | L  | L  | L  | M+ | M         | M  | M- | M- | M  |    |
| Zimmerman et al., 2015<br><i>Sample 2<sup>i</sup></i> | H           | H  | H  | H  | L  | H           | H  | H  | L  | L  | L          | L  | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | L  | M  | H  | M+                 | M+ | L  | L  | L  | M         | M  | M  | M  | M  |    |
| Zimmerman et al., 2015<br><i>Sample 3<sup>b</sup></i> | H           | H  | H  | M  | L  | H           | H  | L  | L  | L  | M          | M  | H  | H  | H  | L                  | L  | M+ | M+ | H  | L                  | L  | L  | L  | M  | M         | M  | L  | M  | M  |    |

Note. CM = Commitment making, IC = Identification with commitment, EB = Exploration in breadth, RE = Ruminative exploration, Com = Commitment, Exp = Exploration. Approximate z-score cutoff levels for distance from sample mean are: L < -.50, M- = -.25 to -.50, M = -.25 to .25, M+ = .25 to .50, H > .50

<sup>a</sup> Belgian adolescents/emerging adults

<sup>b</sup> Belgian emerging adults, 36% with type 1 diabetes

<sup>c</sup> Belgian emerging adults/young adults

<sup>d</sup> Italian adolescents/emerging adult students

<sup>e</sup> US emerging adult students

<sup>f</sup> Belgian adolescents with congenital cardiac disease

<sup>g</sup> US emerging adult students with both parents born outside the US

<sup>h</sup> French adolescents/emerging adult students

<sup>i</sup> Swiss emerging adult students

and identification with commitment) were used to assess identity status (Luyckx et al., 2005). In relation to the specific identity statuses, roughly a fourth of individuals in identity status model identity achievement were in moratorium when identity status groups were derived from the dual-cycle processes, and over a fourth of individuals in identity status moratorium were in the dual-cycle identity status called diffused diffusion. Individuals assigned to identity diffusion with the identity status model were mainly in dual-cycle carefree diffusion, but roughly a fourth of them were in dual-cycle foreclosure. Less than a fifth of participants in identity status model identity diffusion were in dual-cycle diffused diffusion. These only moderate associations between measures of the two models indicate that, because the identity status model and the dual-cycle model are based on the same theoretical framework and apply similar terminology, there is a need to further explore the associations between the two. Particularly, research investigating the associations between the dual-cycle model and the comprehensive identity status measure the identity status interview, as done in Study III, could shed light on the ways the processes in the models are related.

In making this comparison, it needs to be taken into account that the identity status interview and the DIDS have different temporal focuses and take different approaches to which life areas identity development is studied in. Concerning the difference in temporal focus, the identity status interview and the DIDS differ in how they measure identity exploration and commitment. The identity status interview may be described as having “a ‘built-in’ developmental focus” (Kroger & Marcia, 2011, p. 38) as it includes questions about both past and present exploration and commitments. The DIDS, on the other hand, focuses exclusively on the present levels of the processes of identity development. When using the DIDS to derive identity status it is therefore questionable whether identity achievement, which is characterized by high levels of identity commitment and a history of exploration, is possible to distinguish from foreclosure, which is characterized by high levels of identity commitment and no exploration.

Concerning the difference between the measures in approaches to which life areas identity development is studied in, the DIDS examines exploration and commitments in one loosely defined contextual frame concerning future orientation, using terms such as ‘lifestyle’ or ‘direction’. The identity status interview, on the other hand, assesses identity status in different life areas or identity domains (e.g., occupational identity, romantic relationship identity, and parental identity). Thereafter, a global status assessment is made based on all interview information. In each of the domains, the interview contains information about *whether* a person has explored alternatives and committed to an identity, which is the basis for the identity status coding. However, the interview also contains information about people’s attitudes in the specific areas of life that are chosen for the interview, as well as

developmental narratives about *how*, *when*, and *why* a person's exploration and commitments came to be. Thus, the DIDS and the identity status interview take rather different approaches to the life areas in which identity development is studied. It is critical to note, however, that the information in the identity status interview is typically not analyzed beyond the identity status assessment. Thus, a point of criticism that could be raised regarding both the identity status model and the dual-cycle model is that because of their focus on exploration and commitment they offer little information on how people's identity development is shaped by personal history and past experience (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012).

In sum, only small to moderate associations can be expected between identity development as studied with the identity status model and the dual-cycle model. These expectations are based on previous validations between the DIDS and survey measures based on the identity status model (Luyckx et al., 2005; Zimmermann et al., 2015), as well as on the differences between the two measures discussed above.

## The narrative approach to identity development

Next to the identity status model (Marcia, 1966) and related models focusing on change in continuous measures of exploration and commitment (e.g., Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008), a predominant perspective on identity development in current research on identity is the narrative approach (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012). Compared with the identity status approach, the narrative perspective focuses more attention on how personal history, experience, and social context affect identity development, and it has been suggested that the identity status approach and the narrative approach focus on different aspects of identity development (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012; Syed, 2012). For example, the identity status model and other models related to this paradigm have focused on changes in identity statuses and levels of exploration and commitment, whereas the narrative approach has focused on the detailed processes involved in how people tell and develop stories about themselves. Thus, it may be suggested that a combination of these two approaches could potentially lead to further understanding of the how, when, and why of identity development.

From a narrative perspective, a coherent sense of identity is created through the construction of a life story connecting individuals' memories of past experiences with their present life and imagined future in meaningful ways (McAdams, 2001). People also construct their life stories in relation to cultural stories so that their identities also make sense to the social world in which they live and act (Hammack, 2008). From a developmental perspective, the construction of a coherent life story begins in late adolescence, although children engage in storytelling from an early

age (McAdams & Cox, 2010). This process continues throughout the life course, as individuals will need to update their life stories by adding new episodes and by reworking old ones in relation to new experiences.

A key concept for how a narrative identity is constructed and maintained across the life course is the idea of autobiographic reasoning (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Habermas & Köber, 2015). Through this process, individuals relate different elements in their lives to each other by talking and reflecting over how these elements relate to their past experiences, to their view of themselves in the present, and to their imagined future. In investigating this concept researchers have examined, for example, the extent to which individuals make meaning of and gain insight from past experiences in their stories of past events (McLean & Thorne, 2003). Moreover, researchers have examined how everyday story telling may influence people's views of themselves (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007), and it has been suggested that the telling of stories (to oneself and others) about how one has formed one's sense of identity might be one of the processes through which people maintain a relatively stable sense of identity (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012). The available longitudinal research on narrative identity development across time implies that life stories contain continuous aspects, but also change and develop over time (McAdams et al., 2006; Thorne, Cutting, & Skaw, 1998). More specifically, these studies show some evidence of thematic continuity – that is, similarity in motivations, beliefs and concerns, in life stories in emerging adulthood – although the actual stories told could have changed. One of these studies also showed that across a three-year period emerging adults increased in emotional nuance and understanding of their own self-development in their life stories (McAdams et al., 2006).

Only a few studies have attempted to connect the narrative approach to identity with identity development as described in the identity status model (e.g., Alisat & Pratt, 2012; McLean & Pratt, 2006; Syed & Azmitia, 2008, 2010). The existing research shows some connections between high scores on identity achievement and greater narrative processing in turning point narratives (McLean & Pratt, 2006), and more personal meaningful stories in narratives about religion (Alisat & Pratt, 2012). Moreover, changes in story themes across time in ethnic identity narratives have been found to be connected to an increase in identity status process exploration (Syed & Azmitia, 2010). Overall, studies combining the identity status model with a narrative approach to identity indicate that the construction of stories may be an important aspect of how individuals explore identity alternatives and of how they establish and maintain identity commitments. Thus, a combination of these perspectives on identity development, as applied in Study II, may potentially contribute to a larger understanding of the complex processes involved in lifelong identity development. In this study, identity status interview narratives are

examined with both identity status theory and a narrative approach to identity, asking whether there is continued identity development after identity commitments have been made and what this development might look like.

## Identity contents and salience of identity domains

Within the identity status perspective identity development is, as previously mentioned, typically studied in different life areas or identity domains (e.g., occupational identity, romantic relationship identity, and parental identity). Often, people's overall identity development is then described with a global identity status, which is based on the individual's identity development in the domains studied. However, the underlying assumption is that as long as the identity domains used in a study can be considered salient to the participants' lives their exploration of and commitment to these life areas will reflect the state of their underlying sense of identity (Marcia, 1966, 2007). Therefore, which domains to cover when studying identity development in a specific group of people should be adjusted to age and socio-cultural context, and in the assessment of global identity status, weight should be placed on people's identity status in domains that are personally salient (Marcia et al., 1993).

The few studies concerning how identity status in different identity domains may differ within the same individual indicate that, although a person's trajectory of commitment development appears to be fairly similar across different identity domains (Kunnen, 2010), people do not necessarily develop their identities in different identity domains simultaneously (Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, & Kokko, 2005; Frisé & Wängqvist, 2011). For example, previous results from the GoLD (Gothenburg Longitudinal Study of Development), which is the basis for this thesis, reflect that among Swedish emerging adults identity achievement was the most common identity status in the areas of occupational identity, the work/family priorities identity, and global identity status, whereas foreclosure was the most common identity status in areas of romantic relationship and parenthood (Frisé & Wängqvist, 2011). Different identity domains can also be of varied salience for different groups of people, for example across different cultural contexts. For instance, focus group studies have found that religious identity is not considered a relevant identity domain for many young Swedes (Frisé & Bergh, 2006). Thus, religion was not included as an identity domain in the studies in this thesis.

Gender differences in identity status have often only been found in certain identity domains, which suggests that the importance of exploring different identity domains may differ across genders. For example, women more often than men are assigned to identity achievement in intimate relationship identity domains

(Fadjukoff et al., 2005), whereas men more often than women are assigned to foreclosure or identity diffusion in both intimate relationship and interpersonal domains (Fadjukoff et al., 2005; H. L. Lewis, 2003). A closer look at the interplay between identity contents and gender in the specific cultural setting of the present thesis suggests that gender may play a role in young Swedish people's identity development (Ferrer-Wreder et al., 2012). To my knowledge, only five studies have explored identity formation in Sweden through the identity status model (Bergh & Erling, 2005; Frisé & Wängqvist, 2011; Schwartz, Adamson, Ferrer-Wreder, Dillon, & Berman, 2006; Wängqvist & Frisé, 2011, 2013); and of these, only two have examined the interplay between domain-specific identity and gender in more detail (Frisé & Wängqvist, 2011; Wängqvist & Frisé, 2013). Wängqvist and Frisé (2013) found that 18-year-old Swedish women were more likely to explore identity issues than men of the same age, especially in interpersonal and ideological domains of identity. Moreover, previous results from the GoLD reflected gender differences in Swedish emerging adults' identity development in global identity status as well as the identity domains of romantic relationship, parenthood, and work/family priorities, but not in occupational identity (Frisé & Wängqvist, 2011). Specifically, women were more likely than men to be assigned to identity achievement on global identity status, in the romantic relationship identity domain, and in the work/family priorities identity domain. On the other hand, men were more likely than women to be assigned to identity diffusion on global identity status, in the romantic relationship identity domain, in the parenthood identity domain, and in the work/family priorities identity domain. Taken together, these results indicate that there are group-level differences between Swedish women's and men's identity development, and that these differences are related to the domain in which identity is studied.

Apart from the salience of identity domains, few studies have investigated how differences in the actual contents embedded in people's identities matter to the course of their identity development (Syed & McLean, 2015). As mentioned, the identity status interview contains implicit information about the contents of people's identities in the different identity domains chosen for the interview. In Study I, my co-authors and I use this information to study Swedish emerging adults' attitudes in two specific identity domains, parenthood and priorities between work and family. Building upon the gender differences found in previous studies of domain-specific identity status (Frisé & Wängqvist, 2011), we also explored gender differences in the actual contents of these identity domains.

## Identity development post emerging adulthood

Although Erikson emphasized that identity development continues throughout the lifespan, few longitudinal studies have investigated what happens with identity development in the long term, or even just as people move beyond emerging adulthood (e.g., Cramer, 2004; Fadjukoff et al., 2005; Helson & Srivastava, 2001; Josselson, 1996). Instead, development in adulthood is often studied through theories that make less of a split between different aspects of development, such as identity and personality, or cognitive, social and emotional development (e.g., Kegan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1976; Magai & Nusbaum, 1996). However, the results from the more identity-focused longitudinal studies, combined with studies of specific periods in adulthood, such as midlife (Lilgendahl, Helson, & John, 2013), and retrospective studies of adulthood (e.g., Stewart, Ostrove, & Helson, 2001), indicate that identity development does continue in adulthood.

Beginning with research using the identity status model, findings show that many people are not assigned to identity achievement at the end of emerging adulthood (Kroger et al., 2010), which indicates that identity development may often continue after this developmental phase. Moreover, in line with the theoretical suggestion that adults need to reconstruct their identities in order to incorporate new elements, as life changes and new developmental crises occur (Marcia, 2002), it has been found that new experiences in different areas of life, such as work and family, are related to changes in identity status scores in adulthood (Cramer, 2004). It has also been suggested that after reaching identity achievement people may temporarily revisit the moratorium status when faced with experiences that require them to re-evaluate their identity commitments (Kroger, 1996; Marcia, 2002). This pattern is referred to as MAMA cycles, as it represents a cyclical movement between moratorium and identity achievement (Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992).

Concerning long-term change in identity status in the early adult years, only two previous studies were found (Cramer, 2004; Fadjukoff et al., 2005). One indicated an increase in all identity statuses except identity diffusion, which decreased, over three data points across 24 years of adult life (Cramer, 2004). The second one, a three-wave study between ages 27 and 42, showed that the number of participants assigned to committed identity statuses (foreclosure or identity achievement) increased with age, and at both age 36 and age 42 over 80% of the participants were assigned to a committed identity status (Fadjukoff et al., 2005). Thus, both these studies suggest that there is continued identity development in adulthood.

When identity development in adulthood is examined, it needs to be acknowledged that the identity status model was developed to describe identity development during adolescence and, apart from the cyclical movement between



identity achievement and moratorium (Stephen et al., 1992), this model provides no room for further identity development beyond identity achievement. Kroger (2003) has suggested that whereas identity formation in adolescence typically involves change in both the identity contents and identity status, identity changes in adulthood do not necessarily occur simultaneously in both these aspects. This means that after establishing a stable sense of identity, people may change the contents of their identities several times during the course of adulthood without ever changing identity status. Kroger (2003) exemplifies this by describing a person who changed the content of her religious beliefs in conjunction with her whole family, with whom she strongly identifies. Thus, despite the changed content of her religious identity, her identity status in this domain remained foreclosed. Moreover, Kroger (2015) suggests that because the identity status model was developed to capture identity development in late adolescence or emerging adulthood, it may need to be expanded to capture further identity development in adulthood. This may be related to more general theories of development beyond the identity status literature. For example, Kegan (1982, 2003) describes how during adulthood some people develop a certain distance to their own theories and ideologies, such as identity commitments, and are able to hold onto and relate to multiple theories, rather than projecting opposites between them. This suggests that developing a sense of identity is, for some people, only a starting point for developing more complex ways of relating to the world.

As noted in previous sections, several researchers have argued that the identity status model may not be sufficient for describing longitudinal identity development, especially in adult life (e.g., Kunnen & Bosma, 2003; van Hoof & Raaijmakers, 2003). It has been suggested that people's maintenance and development of their identities are better described through how they continuously handle conflicts between their identity commitments and the surrounding context (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Whitbourne, Sneed, & Skultety, 2002). Building on Piaget's (1960) theory of cognitive development these researchers describe how, when faced with conflict between identity commitments and context, individuals may assimilate, by seeking out information on the new experiences that confirms their current identity, or accommodate, by changing their perception of themselves in response to the experiences. According to Bosma and Kunnen (2001), change in identity commitments does not happen through a single conflicting experience. Rather, people will first try to assimilate when faced with experiences of conflict, but if this fails the conflict will remain. Because the identity commitment is no longer confirmed by the context, repeated experiences of unresolved conflicts will result in a weakened identity commitment, which may lead to a change in the commitment. Whitbourne and colleagues (2002) also suggest that in adulthood people may have established a predominant identity process style, so that when

faced with conflicting experiences they primarily use either assimilation, accommodation or a balance of the two, the last of which is considered optimal.

Narrative research on adult identity development (e.g., King, 2001; Pals, 2006) has also focused on people's ways of handling different life events; particularly, how people's narration of negative experiences affects their identity development or closely related concepts, such as ego development (Hy & Loevinger, 1996), which may be described as the development of a sense of meaning, mastery and self-understanding (Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013). This research has shown that the exploration and accommodation of negative life events in midlife are connected with increased ego development and maturity (King & Raspin, 2004; King, Scollon, Ramsey, & Williams, 2000; Pals, 2006). Recent findings also show that this only appears to be the case when the negative event itself has occurred in midlife, as opposed to earlier (Lilgendahl et al., 2013). In line with these findings, Lilgendahl (2015) suggests that it might be that whereas the experience and exploration of positive self-defining events is crucial for the formation of a sense of identity in emerging adulthood, further identity development in adulthood often takes place through the exploration and understanding of negative life events.

In sum, previous theory and research suggest that identity development continues in adulthood. Some theory and research also suggest that in adulthood people develop a predominant style through which they process new experiences. Moreover, there are indications that identity development in adulthood may be both similar to and different from adolescence and emerging adulthood. The present thesis focuses on identity development in the late twenties; that is, precisely the transition between these two developmental periods — from the active identity exploration that typically characterizes emerging adulthood to the identity consolidation and potentially more stable structures that characterize adulthood.

## GENERAL AIM

The overall aim of this thesis was to study contents and processes of identity development among people in their late twenties. Study I concerns identity contents within the specific domains of parenthood and priorities between work and family, focusing on the unique cultural context in which young Swedish people develop their identities in these domains. Study II concerns processes of identity development, with a special focus on how people, after making identity commitments, maintained and continued to evolve their identities across time. Study III compares two models that are commonly used for studying identity development and that originate from the same theoretical framework: the identity status model and the dual-cycle model of identity formation.

# SUMMARY OF THE STUDIES

## The GoLD

All three studies were based on interviews and survey measures with young people participating in the GoLD (**G**othenburg **L**ongitudinal study of **D**evelopment). The GoLD began over 30 years ago in 1982 at the Department of Psychology at the University of Gothenburg. The study originally included a community sample of 144 children in the Gothenburg area, the second largest city in Sweden (Lamb et al., 1988). At the start of the study, participants were recruited from waiting lists for public childcare in different areas of Gothenburg. Approximately 75% of the contacted families agreed to participate. Apart from the participants' age, inclusion criteria at the start of the study were that they should be the firstborn (or not living with a sibling under twelve years of age), live with both their parents and not have begun regular daycare (or spent more than four weeks in out of home care), and that their parents should be able to understand enough Swedish to participate in interviews and surveys (Broberg, 1989). The families in the study came from a variety of backgrounds, and a comparison with a representative sample of 10% of all 10-24-month-olds in Gothenburg (Broberg & Hwang, 1985) showed overall good compliance (Lamb et al., 1988).

As Table 2 shows, the GoLD includes nine waves of data collection to date. The participants have been visited 19 times over a 30-year period, starting when they were one to two years old and the latest visit occurring when they were 29 years old. The retention rate among the original 144 participants has varied between 82 and 95% throughout the waves. The studies included in this thesis concerned the eighth and ninth waves of the GoLD study, when the participants were approximately 25 and 29 years old, respectively. In the eighth wave 136 participants (68 women, 68 men), aged 24 to 26 years ( $M = 24.9$ ,  $SD = 0.7$ ) participated (94% of the original sample). Twelve individuals who had participated at age 25 did not wish to participate, or were unreachable at the time of data collection at age 29. Thus, the ninth wave included 124 participants (63 women, 61 men; 86% of the original sample), aged 28 to 30 years ( $M = 29.3$ ,  $SD = 0.6$ ).

At both ages 25 and 29, most of the participants were interviewed at the Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg (119 at age 25 and 102 at age 29). At age 25, 14 participants who could not or did not want to come to the university were interviewed in their homes, two in hotel lobbies, and one at a café.

At age 29, for the same reason, six participants were interviewed at another Swedish university, five in their homes, three at public libraries, one in a hotel lobby, and one at her workplace. At this age, six participants who were not able to meet with us were interviewed via the voice-over-IP service Skype ( $n = 3$ ) or telephone ( $n = 3$ ).

Table 2. *Overview of Data Collections in the GoLD*

| Wave | Age<br>(years) | Visit | Location                     |
|------|----------------|-------|------------------------------|
| 1    | 1-2            | 1     | At home                      |
|      |                | 2     | At home                      |
|      |                | 3     | In childcare                 |
| 2    | 2-3            | 4     | At home                      |
|      |                | 5     | At home                      |
|      |                | 6     | In childcare                 |
| 3    | 3-4            | 7     | At home                      |
|      |                | 8     | At home                      |
|      |                | 9     | In childcare                 |
| 4    | 6-7            | 10    | At home                      |
|      |                | 11    | At home                      |
|      |                | 12    | In childcare/preschool       |
| 5    | 8-9            | 13    | At home                      |
|      |                | 14    | In school                    |
| 6    | 15-16          | 15    | At home                      |
|      |                | 16    | At home                      |
| 7    | 21-22          | 17    | Department of Psychology, GU |
| 8    | 24-26          | 18    | Department of Psychology, GU |
| 9    | 28-30          | 19    | Department of Psychology, GU |

Table 3 contains more information about the participants' occupational status and family life at ages 25 and 29. The proportion of participants working after postsecondary education increased between ages 25 and 29, whereas the proportion of participants in education decreased. More were also in romantic relationships, cohabiting with a romantic partner, and had or were expecting children at age 29 than at age 25.

At both ages 25 and 29 most participants lived in the Gothenburg area (74% at age 25 and 62% at age 29). Among those living elsewhere, at age 25, 15% lived in middle-sized Swedish cities or smaller towns and 4% lived in Stockholm, Sweden's capital and largest city. At age 29, 14% lived in middle-sized Swedish cities or smaller towns and 14% lived in Stockholm or Malmö, which is the third largest city

in Sweden. Few lived in rural areas, and at both ages a group of participants lived abroad (7% at age 25 and 11% at age 29).

Table 3. *Description of Participants' Occupational Status and Family Life at Ages 25 and 29*

|   | Age 25       | Age 29       |
|---|--------------|--------------|
|   | N = 136      | N = 124      |
|   | <i>n</i> (%) | <i>n</i> (%) |
| <b>Occupational status</b>              |              |              |
| Student                                 | 52 (38)      | 15 (12)      |
| Working after postsecondary education   | 30 (22)      | 74 (60)      |
| Working without postsecondary education | 44 (32)      | 30 (24)      |
| Other <sup>a</sup>                      | 10 (7)       | 5 (4)        |
| <b>Family life</b>                      |              |              |
| In a romantic relationship              | 88 (65)      | 97 (78)      |
| Cohabiting with partner                 | 67 (49)      | 79 (64)      |
| Have or expecting children              | 12 (9)       | 44 (36)      |

<sup>a</sup>For example, unemployed or on long-term sick leave.

## Study I

The first study of this thesis concerns Swedish emerging adults' identity content within the specific domains of parenthood and priorities between work and family. It also focuses on the unique cultural context in which young Swedish people develop their identities in these domains.

### Aims

The objective of Study I was to investigate what expectations Swedish emerging adults had regarding a possible future parenthood and work/family priorities. Four specific questions guided the investigations:

1. What expectations do Swedish emerging adults have of a future parenthood?
2. Are there gender differences in Swedish emerging adults' expectations of a future parenthood?
3. What expectations do Swedish emerging adults have of future work/family priorities?
4. Are there gender differences in Swedish emerging adults' expectations of future work/family priorities?

## Participants

Study I included data from the eighth wave of the GoLD study, when the participants were on average 25 years old. Because the research questions focused on future parenthood, the participants who had or were expecting children at the time of data collection were not included in the present study. Hence, 124 participants (58 women and 66 men) were included in the analysis. In the part of the study that concerned work/family priorities another female participant was excluded, since she was a stepmother and already had the role of parent in her everyday life.

## Measures

A structured **background interview** was performed with all participants, including questions about the participants' romantic relationships, living situation, education, and current occupational context. The participants were also asked if they had or were currently expecting children.

**Marcia's Ego Identity Status Interview** (Marcia et al., 1993) was also performed with the participants. The interview was translated into Swedish and adapted to Swedish conditions (Frisén & Wängqvist, 2011). In Study I, only the content of the identity domains of parenthood and priorities between work and family were used. Questions in this part of the interview included the following: Do you want to become a parent? Why is it that you want/do not want to become a parent? What would it mean to you to become a parent? How would you want to be as a parent? Have you always known that you want to become a parent? How likely is it that you will change your mind about becoming a parent? Have you thought about work/family conflicts? Do you have experience of work/family conflicts? How would you solve work/family conflicts? How do you want to prioritize between work and family in your life?

## Data analysis

The participants' interview answers were analyzed with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, 20 interviews were transcribed. The interviews were read paragraph by paragraph, and statements related to the purpose of the study were given initial codes. Codes that were similar to each other were then grouped together, and basic themes were formed. After this, 15 additional interviews were transcribed, the themes were re-evaluated, and a coding scheme was established. The remaining interviews were coded while listening to recordings of the interviews. To ensure reliability, 20% of the interviews (randomly selected from the transcribed interviews) were re-coded by a second rater. Overall, the percentage of inter-rater agreement between the first and second raters was 93%, with an average kappa of .81.

We analyzed how common each theme was among the participants by examining how many of them had given answers that were coded to each theme. To reveal possible gender differences in the frequency of answers coded to each theme, chi-square analyses were conducted.

## Main findings

Thematic analysis showed that most participants were sure they wanted to become parents. In addition, a group of participants probably wanted to have children, whereas only few had a hesitant attitude toward having children. None of the participants were sure that they did not want to become parents. Regardless of their main attitude towards having children or not, a majority of all participants spontaneously mentioned that they did not want to become parents right now, in their mid-twenties. Some also gave reasons for this postponement, such as that before having children they wanted to be in a stable financial situation or a committed romantic relationship, and to take time for self-focus.

The vast majority of participants also declared reasons for wanting to become parents, the most common being that parenthood was part of a self-actualization process, and expressing positive thoughts about children in general. Other reasons for wanting to become a parent expressed by the participants were that parenthood was a social norm, that parenthood was natural, and that they felt inspired by other parents in their social circle. Moreover, a group of participants talked about possible disruptions on the path towards parenthood, such as fertility issues, not having a partner to have children with, and experiencing a feeling of not longing for children.

About half of the participants wanted to prioritize either work or family over the other (family over work in the vast majority of these cases), whereas about a third of the participants wanted to prioritize work and family equally. A smaller group reported wanting to focus their attention on one thing at a time. A majority of the participants also gave examples of how they wanted to handle work/family conflicts. These examples were categorized into one of two subthemes: taking action and presenting hands-on practical solutions to the conflicts; or trying to communicate with one's partner or workplace.

Several gender differences were found. More women than men talked about parenthood as a social norm, and about the possibility that their path towards parenthood might be disrupted. With regard to work/family priorities, more women than men wanted to prioritize both work and family, whereas more men than women wanted to prioritize either work or family over the other. More women than men also gave examples of how they wanted to handle work/family conflicts. In addition, analyses of the background information about the participants' occupational situations and family lives indicated that more men than women were working



without any postsecondary education, and that more women than men were cohabiting with a romantic partner.

## Study II

The second study concerns the process of identity development between ages 25 and 29, with special focus on how identity development continues after identity commitments have been made.

### Aims

The objective of Study II was to investigate identity development in the late twenties in order to learn more about continued identity development after identity commitments have been made. Three specific research questions guided the investigation:

1. What patterns of identity status change and stability may be seen in the late twenties?
2. How do the identity narratives of individuals with established identity commitments and stable identity status develop over time?
3. How is the identity development of individuals repeatedly assigned to identity achievement different from that of individuals repeatedly assigned to foreclosure?

### Participants

Study II included data from the eighth and ninth waves of the GoLD study, when the participants were on average 25 and 29 years old, respectively. The study includes the 124 (63 women, 61 men) participants who were involved in both data collections, since all analyses required data from both ages 25 and 29.

### Measures

A structured **background interview** as described in Study I was performed with all participants at both ages 25 and 29.

**Marcia's Ego Identity Status Interview** (Marcia et al., 1993) as described in Study I was performed with the participants at both age 25 and age 29. The identity domains explored at both ages were *occupation*, *romantic relationships*, *parenthood*, and *work/family priorities*. At age 29 a personal identity domain, in which the participants themselves decided what they wanted to talk about, was also included. The questions asked differed slightly between domains, but in all domains the participants were asked various questions about whether they had decided on a current commitment, how they had reached this commitment, what their current

commitment meant to them, and if they had always had a similar commitment or if their ideas had changed across time. Specific questions in the different identity domains included: How did you decide you wanted to work with \_\_\_\_\_? What does it/would it mean to you (to have a romantic relationship)? Have you always known you wanted to/did not want to become a parent, or has there been a time in your life when you thought about it differently? Have your ideas about how you want to prioritize between work and family ever changed?. Based on their exploration of alternatives and their commitments to chosen directions, the participants were assigned to one of four identity statuses for each identity domain: identity achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, or identity diffusion. All participants were also assigned a *global identity status*, which was based on all the interview information. In this study, this global status was used.

All interviews were performed by trained interviewers who rated the commitments and exploration as well as assessed identity status following the guidelines outlined by Marcia and colleagues (1993). To ensure reliability in the coding, a random sample of interviews ( $n = 20$ ) was re-coded by a second rater at both interview occasions. The exact agreement for global identity status assessment at age 25 was 85% between the first and second raters, with a kappa of .77 (Frisén & Wängqvist, 2011). At age 29 the exact agreement for global identity status assessment between the first and second raters was 85%, with a kappa of .72.

## Data analysis

An explanatory mixed methods design (Nastasi, Hitchcock, & Brown, 2010) was applied in the present study. This design is sequential, and the data analysis was thus performed in two parts, described below.

In the first part of the analysis, quantitative investigations of stability and change in identity status between ages 25 and 29 were conducted. First, group-level stability and change in identity status between the interview occasions were analyzed with the McNemar test of significance of changes (Siegel & Castellan, 1988). Next, typical and atypical patterns of individual stability and change were identified with the cross-tabulation procedure EXACON (Bergman, Magnusson, & El-Khoury, 2003). The EXACON procedure is built on the Fisher four-field hypergeometric distribution test, and identifies which patterns of stability and change are more likely to occur than expected by chance, and which patterns are less likely to occur than expected by chance. Gender differences in identity status at both ages 25 and 29 were analyzed with cross-tabulation chi-square analysis. Chi-square goodness of fit was used to analyze gender differences in the frequency of participants assigned to identity achievement at both ages 25 and 29, and the frequency of participants assigned to foreclosure at both ages. A restricted alpha

level,  $p < .01$ , was chosen for all analyses, due to the number of significance tests performed.

In the second part of the analysis, my co-authors and I returned to the interview narratives upon which the identity status assessments were based. In this part, the interview narratives from the 55 participants (35 women, 20 men) that were coded to either identity achievement ( $n = 32$ ) or foreclosure ( $n = 23$ ) at both ages 25 and 29 were approached with qualitative analysis. The analysis was performed in five steps:

1. Differences and similarities between the participants' interview narratives from age 25 and age 29 were analyzed for a subset of 15 participants, each of whom was treated as a singular case study. The case study methodology allows for a holistic, yet detailed, view of complex phenomena (Yin, 2009). Thus, the use of a case study approach in this part of the analysis contributed to a retention of the characteristics of each individual's process of identity development. This step resulted in 15 case summaries.
2. The 15 case summaries were analyzed with an inductive thematic approach. Thematic analysis is used for the systematic identification and analysis of patterns, or themes, in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Starting out with six case summaries, my co-authors and I identified several very specific patterns and themes, close to the manifest content of the case summaries. These patterns and themes were then grouped together, resulting in a preliminary model and a coding scheme with three overarching dimensional themes. The dimensions stretched between two endpoints: a weakening or a deepening of the identity narrative. The weakening endpoint reflected a shallower identity narrative that had not evolved between the interview occasions, while the deepening endpoint reflected a richer narrative that had evolved between the ages. The preliminary coding scheme was applied to the rest of the 15 case summaries ( $n = 9$ ), resulting in smaller alterations in the descriptions of the dimensions. After this, the dimensions were named and the final model was developed.
3. Based on the model from the thematic analysis, a coding scheme was constructed. In the scheme, each of the three dimensions in the model was divided into three broad categories to facilitate the coding: one at the deepening end, one at the weakening end, and one in the middle.
4. Similarities and differences between the interview occasions were summarized for each of the 40 remaining participants. These 40 case summaries were coded according to the coding scheme developed in Step 3.
5. To ensure reliability, a second rater re-coded a random sample of case summaries ( $n = 20$ ) according to the coding scheme. Reliability was tested with percentage of exact agreement and weighted kappa (Cohen, 1968). The overall exact agreement

between the first and second raters was 75% with an average linear weighted kappa of .68.

## Main findings

No significant changes were found in the overall distribution of participants over the four identity status positions (identity achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity diffusion) between ages 25 and 29. Identity achievement was the most common identity status at both ages 25 and 29, followed by foreclosure. Identity diffusion was the least common identity status at age 25, whereas moratorium was the least common identity status at age 29. Half of the participants were coded to the same identity status at both ages 25 and 29. Half of those who changed identity status between the interview occasions changed in a progressive direction, and half changed in a regressive direction (according to Waterman's [1982] developmental order of the identity statuses). The 14 specific patterns of individual stability and change that were found are illustrated in Table 4.

An analysis of typical and atypical patterns of stability and change in identity status showed that for participants who were initially assigned to identity achievement, foreclosure, or identity diffusion at age 25 it was typical to be assigned to the same identity status at age 29, but not for participants initially assigned to moratorium. Two atypical patterns of change in identity status were found: it was atypical to move from identity achievement to identity diffusion, and from identity diffusion to identity achievement. Thus, the typical patterns that emerged were all patterns of stability, and regardless of initial identity status no typical patterns of change in identity status were found.

Table 4. *Distribution of Patterns of Stability and Change in Identity Status between Ages 25 and 29*

| Identity status<br>at age 25 | Identity status at age 29 |             |            |                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|------------|-----------------------|
|                              | Identity achievement      | Foreclosure | Moratorium | Identity<br>diffusion |
|                              | <i>n</i>                  | <i>n</i>    | <i>n</i>   | <i>n</i>              |
| Identity achievement         | 32                        | 13          | 6          | -                     |
| Foreclosure                  | 12                        | 23          | -          | 4                     |
| Moratorium                   | 9                         | 4           | 1          | 4                     |
| Identity diffusion           | 1                         | 7           | 1          | 7                     |

Gender played a significant role in identity status at both ages 25 and 29. At age 25 more women than men were assigned to identity achievement, and at both ages 25 and 29 more men than women were assigned to identity diffusion. All individuals who were assigned to identity diffusion at both ages 25 and 29 were men. In

addition, more women than men were assigned to identity achievement at both ages 25 and 29. No significant gender difference was found among participants who were assigned to foreclosure at both interview occasions.

The longitudinal analysis of how identity narratives from participants with an established sense of identity at both ages 25 and 29 developed over time resulted in a model (illustrated in Figure 3) with three dimensions: *Approach to changing life conditions*, *Meaning making*, and *Development of personal life direction*. The dimensions concern aspects of the development of identity narratives on the continuum between two endpoints: weakening of identity narrative and deepening of identity narrative. The weakening endpoint reflects a shallower identity narrative at age 29 than at age 25, while the deepening endpoint reflects a richer narrative that has evolved between the interview occasions.

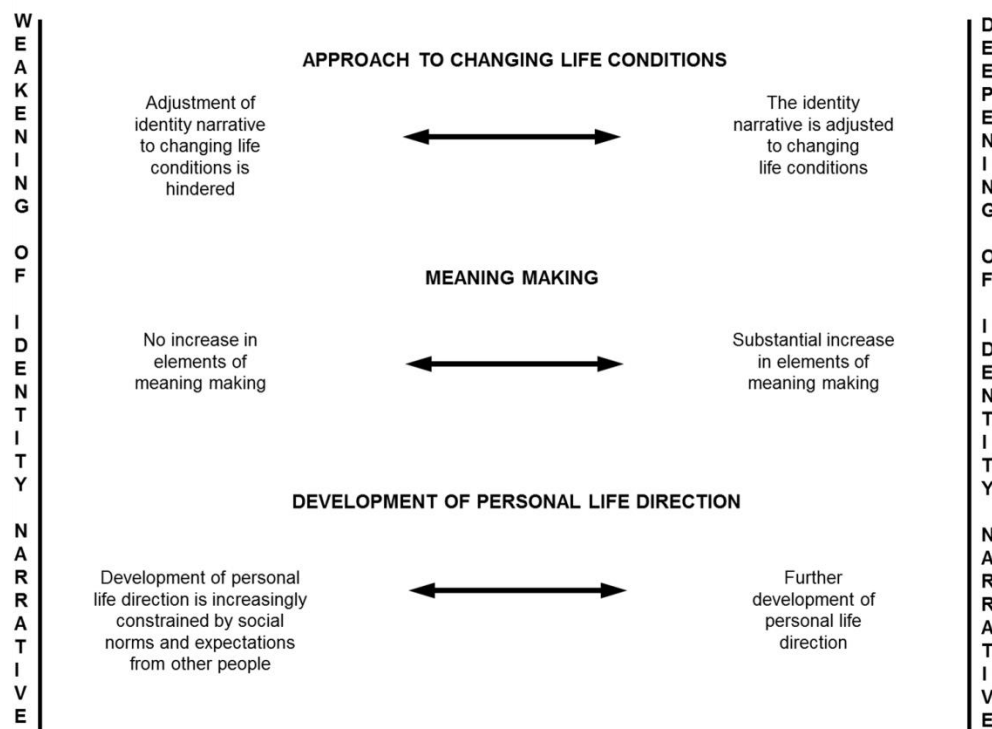


Figure 3. Model of identity development among participants assigned to either identity achievement or foreclosure at both ages 25 and 29.

Dimension 1, approach to changing life conditions, concerned the participants' approach to the fact that life inevitably changes as time goes by. The weakening endpoint of this dimension represents an unwillingness or incapacity to reform and adjust the identity narrative in relation to life changes. Thus, their identity narratives came across as rigid and resistant to change. The deepening endpoint of this dimension represents a proneness and capacity to reformulate and adjust one's identity narrative between the interview occasions. Participants whose case

summaries indicated a deepening of the identity narrative on this dimension had most often made smaller adjustments in their narratives, but some had changed their entire commitment in one or more identity domains. Some, but not all, participants described how and why the change in identity commitments had come about.

Dimension 2, meaning making, is a term commonly used in narrative research on identity formation and refers to how individuals create and maintain a sense of identity by talking and reflecting upon specific life events and past experiences, and how these experiences relate to their personal present and future (e.g., McLean & Thorne, 2003). In this study the meaning making dimension focused on whether and the extent to which the participants had included new elements of meaning between the interview occasions. Since people continuously encounter events of which they may need to make meaning, a very small increase in elements of meaning making between the interview occasions – as well as no increase – was associated with a weakening of the identity narrative. The deepening endpoint of this dimension represents a substantial increase in meaning making elements in the identity narrative between the interview occasions.

Dimension 3, development of personal life direction, describes changes in the participants' descriptions of how they make decisions about the way they want to live their lives. The weakening endpoint of this dimension represents how some participants developed a personal life direction between the interview occasions that had become increasingly constrained by social norms and expectations from others. For example, they expressed increased worry about what others would think about how they lived their lives. The deepening endpoint of this dimension represents further development of a personal life direction between the interview occasions. Participants whose case summaries indicated a deepening of the identity narrative on this dimension indicated that between the interview occasions they had increased their agency to act and make independent decisions about how to live their lives in relation to social norms and expectations from others.

Most participants who were assigned to identity achievement at both ages 25 and 29 were coded towards the deepening end of the model on two or all three dimensions (see Figure 4). In contrast, those assigned to foreclosure at both ages did not show one clear pattern. However, no participants, either among those assigned to identity achievement or foreclosure, were coded to the weakening endpoint of all three dimensions.

Being assigned to the weakening endpoint of any of the dimensions was associated with constraints in identity development. For the first dimension, approach to changing life conditions, participants whose case summaries were coded to the weakening endpoint of this dimension reported rigid identity narratives that were not open to change. Although some of these participants increased in meaning making, their lack of re-evaluation and change of identity commitments still

appeared to hinder the deepening of their identity narratives. For the second dimension, meaning making, participants whose case summaries were coded to the weakening endpoint of this dimension, and to the middle or deepening end of the other two dimensions, could be very certain of their commitments. However, because they did not connect them to their personal history or current context, the commitments came across as sudden and shallow. As for the third dimension, development of personal life direction, participants whose case summaries were coded to the weakening endpoint of this dimension, and the middle or deepening end of the other two dimensions, appeared to look more to traditions and conventions to guide their identity development at age 29 than at age 25.

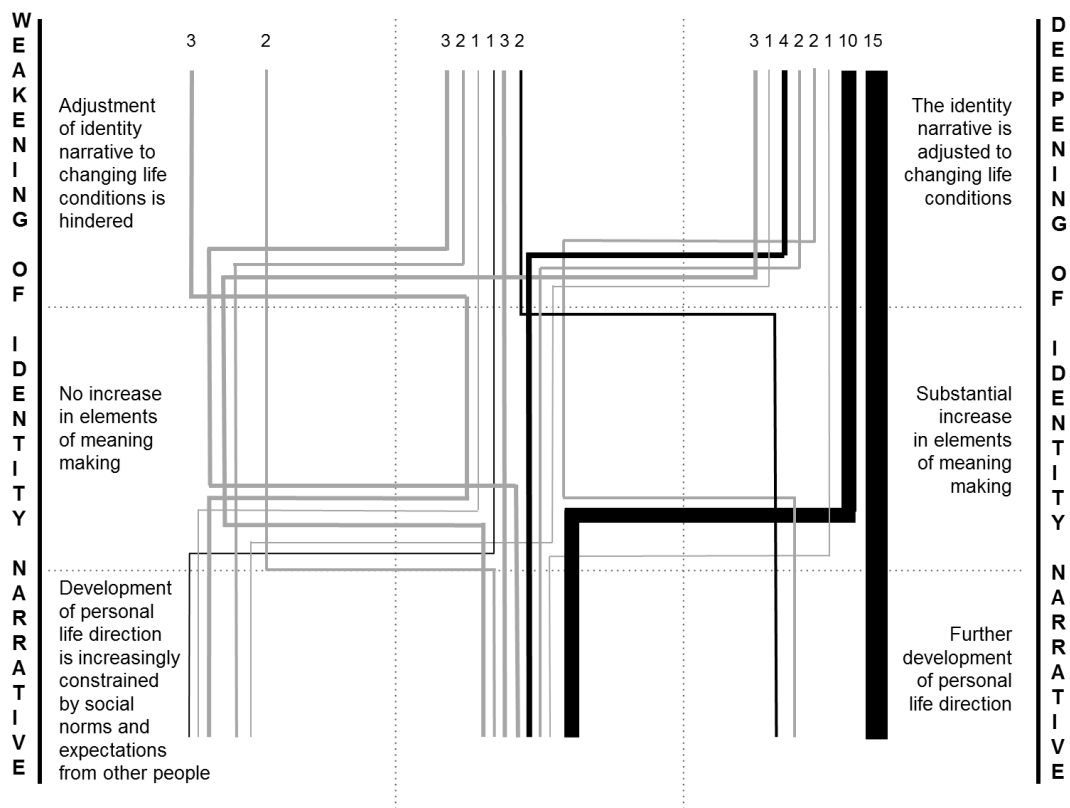


Figure 4. All 16 patterns of development found across the model of identity development among participants assigned to either identity achievement or foreclosure at both ages 25 and 29. The numbers above the bars indicate the number of participants following a specific pattern. The black bars represent participants assigned to identity achievement at both ages 25 and 29, whereas the grey bars represent participants assigned to foreclosure at both ages 25 and 29.

## Study III

The third study compares two models that are commonly used to study identity development and that originate from the same theoretical framework: the identity status model and the dual-cycle model of identity formation.

### Aims

Study III had two objectives: (1) to validate the Swedish version of the dual-cycle model measure DIDS (Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008); and (2) to examine the association between the dual-cycle model as studied with this measure and the identity status model as measured with the identity status interview (Marcia, 1966; Marcia et al., 1993). Hypotheses concerning each of these objectives are outlined below.

#### *Objective I*

In Objective I we hypothesized that either the model with five processes of identity development – commitment making, identification with commitment, exploration in breadth, exploration in depth, and ruminative exploration (e.g., Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008) – or the recently proposed model that also distinguishes between two different kinds of exploration in depth (Zimmermann et al., 2015) would be a sufficient representation of the Swedish young adults' ratings in the DIDS.

Concerning identity status groups, we hypothesized that we would be able to identify the same five identity statuses as found in previous studies using the same measure (e.g., Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008; Schwartz et al., 2011): achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, diffused diffusion, and carefree diffusion. We also expected that a group of participants would report average scores on all scales and therefore have an undefined identity status.

#### *Objective II*

In Objective II we hypothesized that, although the identity status interview and the DIDS are based on the same theoretical framework, we would only find small to moderate correlations between processes of exploration and commitment as measured with the different measures. We also expected only partial overlap between individuals' identity status assessed with the different methods. These hypotheses were based on previous validations between the DIDS and survey measures based on the identity status model (Luyckx et al., 2005; Zimmermann et al., 2015) as well as on differences between the two measures. For example, the interview contains information about how, when, and why identity exploration and commitment take place in different areas of people's lives, such as work or family



life, whereas the DIDS focuses on the present levels of the processes of overall identity development without focusing on specific life areas.

## Participants

Study III included data from the ninth wave of the GoLD study, when the participants were on average 29 years old. As one female participant did not complete the measure of the dual-cycle model, the present study includes 123 participants.

## Measures

Study III was based on the structured **background interview** and **Marcia's Ego Identity Status Interview**, which has been described in the summaries of Studies I and II. Apart from the categorical identity status assessment, described in Study I, ratings of the participants' global identity exploration and commitment were also used in Study III. These ratings were made by the interviewer who met with the participant, on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all present) to 5 (completely present). To ensure reliability, a random sample of interviews ( $n = 20$ ) was re-coded by a second rater. The reliability for the identity processes was acceptable to strong, with intraclass correlations (ICC) of .62 for exploration and .81 for commitment.

All participants completed the **Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS)** (Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008). The DIDS is a 25-item questionnaire that measures the five processes of identity development on which the dual-cycle model of identity formation is based. Each process is measured using five items, each of which is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The processes are, as mentioned, commitment making (e.g., "I have decided on the direction I am going to follow in my life"), identification with commitment (e.g., "My plans for the future match with my true interests and values"), exploration in breadth (e.g., "I think actively about different directions I might take in my life"), exploration in depth (e.g., "I think about the future plans I already made"), and ruminative exploration (e.g., "I am doubtful about what I really want to achieve in life"). The DIDS items were translated into Swedish. A back-translation procedure was used to ensure the accuracy of the translation.

## Data analysis

The reliability of the subscales in the DIDS was examined with Cronbach's alpha and item total correlations (how much each item correlated with the overall scale). Next, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the factor structure of the DIDS in the Swedish cultural context. Standard model fit indices and cutoff levels similar to previous validations of the DIDS were used (e.g., Crocetti et

al., 2011; Luyckx et al., 2010): The chi-square index should be as low as possible; the root square error of approximation (RMSEA) should be less than .08; and the comparative fit index (CFI) should exceed .90, preferably at .95.

Identity statuses were derived from the processes measured in the DIDS using a two-step cluster analysis procedure (Gore, 2000). First, a hierarchical cluster analysis was performed on the  $z$ -scores for the identity processes defined in the CFA. Ward's method and squared Euclidean distances were used. Second, after the number of clusters was determined, an iterative k-means clustering procedure was performed to allow for people to change cluster over the course of the analysis, using the cluster centers from the hierarchical analysis as starting points. Criteria for choosing the cluster solution were theoretical prediction, parsimony of the cluster solution, and explanatory power of the cluster solution (Luyckx, Schwartz et al. 2008).

The associations between identity processes and status, as measured with the identity status interview and the DIDS, were studied through examination of the correlations between the processes measured, by plotting the dual-cycle processes over the four identity statuses from the identity status interview, and through the cross-tabulation procedure EXACON. To avoid mass significance problems, the overlapping patterns were tested in two steps. First, patterns that were expected to overlap from theory and previous research (Luyckx et al., 2005) were tested on regular significance level ( $p < .05$ ). After this, the remaining possible patterns were tested with an adjusted significance level, using the Bonferroni correction (Field, 2009). To further investigate the relationship between the dual-cycle model and the identity status model, the dual-cycle processes were also plotted over the four identity statuses from the identity status interview.

## Main findings

The main findings in Study III are described below, in relation to the two objectives outlined for the study.

### *Objective I*

Reliability for four of the five subscales measured with the DIDS (commitment making, identification with commitment, exploration in breadth, and ruminative exploration) was good ( $\alpha = .78-.82$ ) and in line with most previous studies using the DIDS (e.g. Crocetti et al., 2011; Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008; Schwartz et al., 2011), but the reliability for the exploration in depth scale was poor ( $\alpha = .48$ ). In line with previous studies from France and Switzerland (Zimmermann et al., 2015), further investigations of the item total correlations suggested that the exploration in depth items could be divided into two separate scales: one representing a process of careful evaluation of existing commitments, and one representing a process of

reconsideration in an effort to change or abandon the existing commitment. In this study these scales were called ‘exploration in depth characterized by evaluation’ ( $\alpha = .54$ ) and ‘exploration in depth characterized by reconsideration’ ( $\alpha = .61$ ).

The factorial validation of the dual-cycle model showed that the fit for the original five-factor model (Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008) was poor (see Table 5); therefore the six-factor model, previously suggested by Zimmermann and colleagues (2013), was tested. As shown in Table 5, fit for the six-factor model was better than for the five-factor model,  $\chi^2_{\text{diff}}(5) = 53.87, p < .001$ , but still below the recommended values for some of the fit indices. High overlap in content may result in correlated error terms between items (Byrne, 2012). Therefore, covariance was allowed for the error terms of three pairs of items, which were conceptually very similar, loaded on the same latent factor, and showed high modification indices. This procedure resulted in a small improvement in the fit for the model,  $\chi^2_{\text{diff}}(3) = 37.78, p < .001$ , though it could still only be considered marginally acceptable (see Table 5). Taken together, the factorial validation thus showed that, counter to the hypothesis, neither model – with five or with six processes of identity development – could be considered a sufficient representation of the Swedish young adults’ ratings in the DIDS.

Table 5. *Factorial Validation of the DIDS*

| N = 123                                   | <i>df</i> | $\chi^2$ | RMSEA | CFI |
|---|-----------|----------|-------|-----|
| Five-factor model                         | 265       | 498.12   | .085  | .80 |
| Six-factor model <sup>a</sup>             | 260       | 444.25   | .076  | .84 |
| Six-factor model + error cov <sup>b</sup> | 257       | 406.47   | .069  | .87 |

<sup>a</sup> Exploration in depth characterized by evaluation (Items 21-22), Exploration in depth characterized by reconsideration (Items 23-25)

<sup>b</sup> Covariance of error terms allowed Items 6 and 7; 8 and 10; and 17 and 18.

Table 6. *Mean Levels and Standard Division for the Six Processes Included in the Final Factor Solution for the DIDS*

| Variable  | N = 123  |           |
|---|----------|-----------|
|   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Commitment making   | 3.76     | 0.62      |
| Identification with commitment                                      | 3.68     | 0.61      |
| Exploration in breadth  | 3.39     | 0.76      |
| Exploration in depth characterized by evaluation (Items 21-22)      | 3.54     | 0.81      |
| Exploration in depth characterized by reconsideration (Items 23-25) | 2.49     | 0.81      |
| Ruminative exploration  | 2.32     | 0.81      |

Descriptive data for the six processes included in the final factor solution of the DIDS are displayed in Table 6. A rough comparison with Belgian participants within the same age group indicated that the scores on the commitment dimensions, exploration in breadth, and ruminative exploration were fairly similar (Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Van Petegem, & Beyers, 2013). Because of the split of the exploration in depth scale, the participants' scores on these dimensions could not be compared with previous studies. The identity status groups that were derived through cluster analysis from the processes measured in the DIDS are presented in Figure 5. The study identified three of out of five hypothesized identity statuses (foreclosure, ruminative moratorium, and carefree diffusion) along with two new kinds of moratoriums: reconsideration type and exploration type. As hypothesized, a large undefined identity status cluster was also identified.

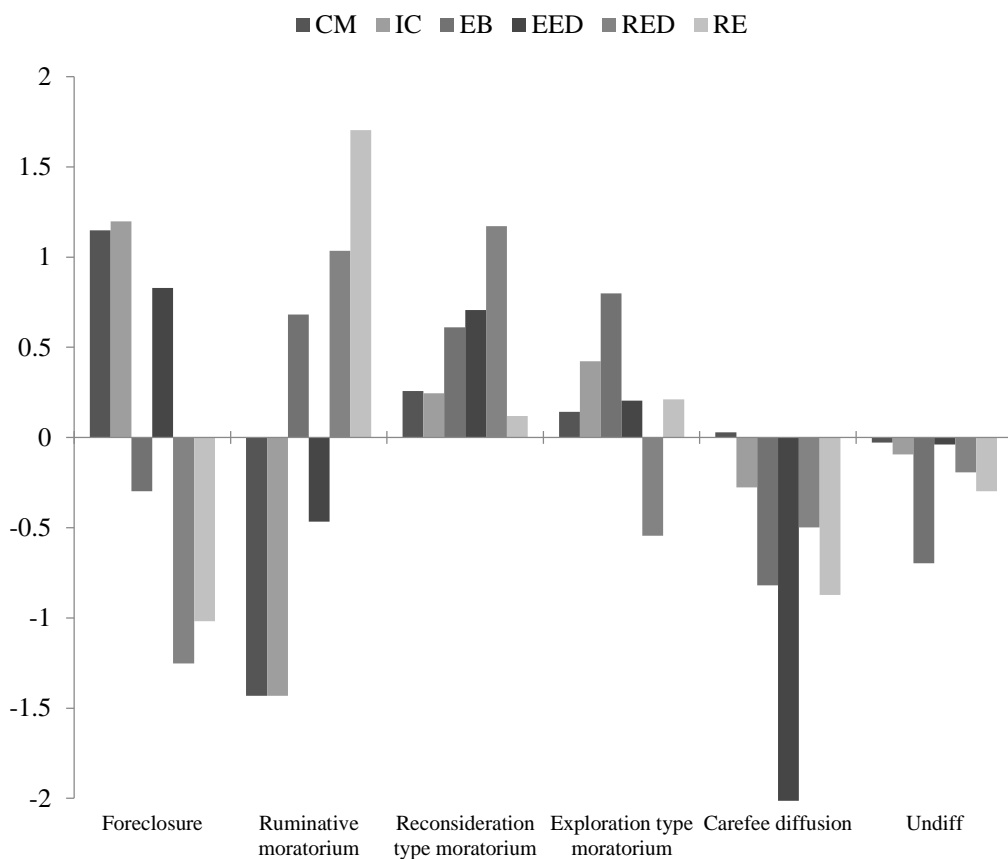


Figure 5. Standardized scores for the final cluster solution for the dual-cycle model. CM = Commitment making, IC = Identification with commitment, EB = Exploration in breadth, EED = Exploration in depth characterized by evaluation (Items 21-22), RED = Exploration in depth characterized by reconsideration (Items 23-25), RE = Ruminative exploration.

### *Objective II*

Overall, the correlations between the participants' levels on the dual-cycle model processes measured in the DIDS and their levels of exploration and commitment as measured in the identity status interview were few and small. Participants' exploration as measured with the identity status interview showed a small positive correlation with their levels of exploration in breadth ( $r = .19$ ), but no significant correlation with their levels of either exploration in depth characterized by evaluation, exploration in depth characterized by reconsideration, ruminative exploration, or any of the commitment scales. Participants' commitment as measured in the identity status interview showed a moderate positive correlation with their levels of commitment making ( $r = .31$ ), a small positive correlation with their levels of identification with commitment ( $r = .22$ ), a small negative correlation with their levels of ruminative exploration ( $r = -.22$ ), and no significant correlations with their levels of the other exploration scales.

Concerning identity status affiliation the cross-tabulation procedure, shown in Table 7, showed that the overlap between identity status as assessed with the different measures was very modest, and only partly in line with previous research. Only three patterns overlapped significantly: for those assigned to identity status interview identity achievement, it was more common than expected by chance to be assigned to dual-cycle foreclosure; for those assigned to identity status interview moratorium, it was more common than expected by chance to be assigned to dual-cycle ruminative moratorium; and for those assigned to identity status interview identity diffusion, it was more common than expected by chance to be assigned to dual-cycle carefree diffusion.

Table 7. *Overlap between Identity Status as Assessed with the DIDS and the Ego Identity Status Interview*

|                                 | Identity status interview identity status |            |             |                    |
|---------------------------------|---|------------|-------------|--------------------|
|                                 | Identity achievement                      | Moratorium | Foreclosure | Identity diffusion |
| Dual-cycle cluster              | <i>n</i>                                  | <i>n</i>   | <i>n</i>    | <i>n</i>           |
| Foreclosure                     | 12  | -          | 3           | 1                  |
| Ruminative moratorium           | 6   | 6          | 4           | 2                  |
| Reconsideration type moratorium | 10  | 2          | 5           | 4                  |
| Exploration type moratorium     | 11  | -          | 7           | 1                  |
| Carefree diffusion              | 1   | -          | 6           | 4                  |
| Undefined                       | 13  | -          | 22          | 3                  |

To further investigate the relationship between the dual-cycle model and the identity status model, the dual-cycle processes were plotted over the four identity statuses from the identity status interview (see Figure 6). The differences between the statuses' scoring patterns and the overall mean were generally modest, but were largely in line with what could be theoretically expected. However, participants assigned to foreclosure with the identity status interview showed only average levels of both commitment processes in the dual-cycle model.

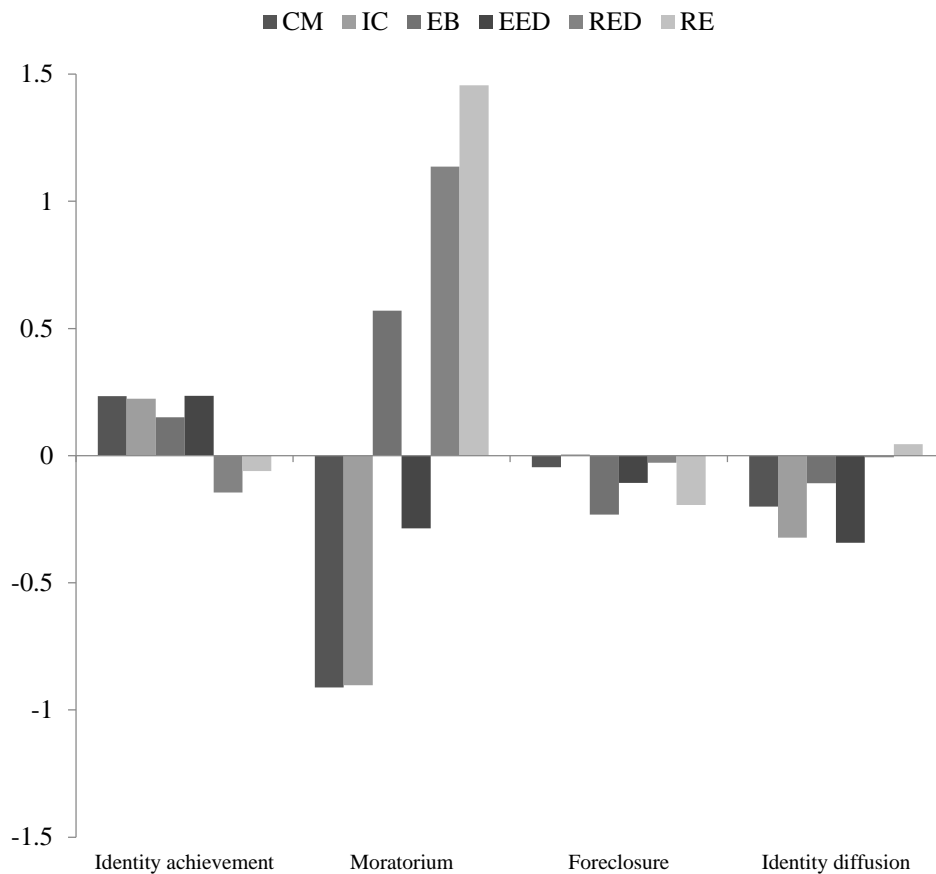


Figure 6. Standardized levels of the dual-cycle processes over the four identity statuses from the Ego Identity Status Interview. CM = Commitment making, IC = Identification with commitment, EB = Exploration in breadth, EED = Exploration in depth characterized by evaluation (Items 21-22), RED = Exploration in depth characterized by reconsideration (Items 23-25), RE = Ruminative exploration.

# GENERAL DISCUSSION

The general aim of this thesis was to study contents and processes of identity development among people in their late twenties. In the following, I address how the results from the studies in this thesis contribute to further knowledge about identity development. Initially, I focus on the specific contributions of each of the three studies. This is followed by two more general sections, concerning the interaction of contents and processes in identity development, and the studies' contribution to further knowledge about people's identity development in their late twenties. Methodological issues in the present thesis are also discussed. Finally, the overarching conclusions of this thesis are outlined.

## Contents of emerging adults' parental identities

Study I examines identity contents within the specific domains of parenthood and priorities between work and family. The specific findings from this study will be discussed below, starting with Swedish emerging adults' attitudes towards parenthood, and followed by a discussion of the gendered expectations on both parenthood and work/family priorities found in the study.

### Swedish emerging adults' expectations on a future parenthood

Study I shows that wanting to become a parent may be considered normative among Swedish emerging adults. The results were extreme; not a single participant in Study I rejected the idea of parenthood altogether, and only a small group of participants had hesitant attitudes towards having children. The norm towards parenthood was also evident in the participants' reasons for wanting to become parents, with parenthood being described as natural and as a social norm. This strong norm towards parenthood may be connected to Swedish cultural values. Because of the ideological notion of gender equality that is deeply imbedded in the Swedish cultural identity (Towns, 2002) and unique social and political factors, such as a generous parental leave program and public childcare (Haas & Hwang, 2008; Trost, 2006), it is possible that neither Swedish women nor men are expected to choose between work and family. Instead, all young people are encouraged to have – and to want – both work and family. In the present study, many participants anticipated that they would experience work/family conflict and have to prioritize between work and

family at some point in their lives, but despite this, few of them suggested that an appealing solution to these issues would be to not have children. This attitude is in contrast to those in some other European countries. For example, studies suggest that in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands over 10% of young women believe that the ideal situation would be to stay childless (Billari, 2005).

That none of the Swedish emerging adults had made the decision to not have children in the future may also be connected to their age. At this age they would still be young parents by Swedish standards, and many of them also viewed parenthood as being far in the future. Thus, the more hesitant participants might not have experienced a need to make up their mind on this issue yet, being only in their mid-twenties. Moreover, because of the strong norm towards parenthood a decision not to have children might be socially questioned. Thus, even people who are fairly sure they do not want to have children might be reluctant to state a decision about this, since they do not need to make a firm decision about it for several years. It is likely that the question of whether or not to have children will become a more pressing issue as the participants get older. To explore this issue further, it could be interesting to investigate how the content of people's parental identities changes over time, especially among those who have a hesitant attitude towards parenthood during emerging adulthood and among those who stay childless/childfree in adulthood.

Although few participants expressed any doubt about wanting to have children, a majority said they wanted to have children in the future rather than right now, in their mid-twenties. They stated mainly two reasons for wanting to postpone parenthood: that certain conditions should be accomplished before having a child, and that right now was the time for self-focus. The conditions mentioned were mainly being in a committed relationship, finishing one's education and having a stable financial situation before having children. Similar conditions have been reported in earlier Swedish studies: one that only included women (Söderberg et al., 2011), and one in which the importance of having achieved certain conditions before having children was actively asked about (Lampic et al., 2006). That participants in Study I mentioned wanting certain conditions to be fulfilled before having children without being asked direct questions about this indicates that they believe that the point at which one has children should be planned, and that children should be born into stable living conditions. This may partly be explained by cultural factors. For example, sexual education concerning what happens in puberty, how a child is conceived, and safe-sex practices is mandatory throughout the Swedish school system (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011). Moreover, a previous study suggests that, among young Swedes with higher education, a dominant social discourse is that early parenthood is unfavorable and a sign of low ambition (Eriksson et al., 2013). This connects to the other reason for postponing parenthood



in Study I, that the mid-twenties is a time for self-focus rather than having children. However, many of the participants also stated that having children is partly a self-actualization process. Similar results have been found in earlier Swedish and Norwegian studies (Lampic et al., 2006; Ravn, 2005; Söderberg et al., 2011). Thus, the way the participants in Study I talked about children, self-focus and self-actualization indicates that, depending on the timing, children can be both an obstacle to and part of an individual's personal development. Becoming a parent too early is viewed as a limitation to the individual's personal development, while becoming a parent when the time is right is considered positive for the same individual's personal development.

### Gendered expectations on parenthood and work/family priorities

The gender differences found in Study I indicate that emerging adult Swedish women feel more social pressure towards parenthood than do emerging adult Swedish men. This suggests that, even if both women and men in Sweden are encouraged to have and want both a career and a family life, the social norm of wanting to become a parent might still be stronger for women than men. Throughout history, motherhood has often been described as a crucial part of the female identity (Hirdman, 2001; Nicolson, 1997). Therefore, despite the overall strong norm toward parenthood in Sweden and national efforts for gender equality, it might be that parenthood is still viewed as more optional for men than for women.

Further, the gender differences in Study I indicate that as emerging adults women have, to a larger extent than men, reflected over what having a future family life would entail, especially with regard to work/family priorities. That is, in this study, more women than men talked about parenthood as a social norm and about the possibility that their path towards parenthood might be disrupted. Moreover, more women than men wanted to prioritize both work and family, and more women than men also gave examples of how they wanted to handle work/family conflicts. In relation to these gender differences, it needs to be taken into account that the women in this study might be ahead of the men on their route towards family life; the mean age of first-time Swedish mothers is about two years lower than that of first-time fathers. Results from Study I also show that more women than men were already cohabiting with a romantic partner during emerging adulthood. In addition, it is possible that women, even when they are young, are more stressed about parenthood compared to men, since women's fertility has a definite end with menopause while men are able to reproduce at higher ages. Further, research – preferably longitudinal – is needed to determine how both young women's and men's expectations about parenthood might change over time. Even so, the results from Study I suggest that in their overall identity development during their emerging adult years, taking into account future parenthood and work/family conflicts is more

central for young women than for young men. Thus, it may be suggested that the gender differences found in emerging adults' expectations on parenthood and work/family priorities may affect gender equality in other areas of life, such as work. Since more women than men thought about work/family conflicts in their mid-twenties, they might be less eager to enter career paths that are hard to combine with family life. Therefore, although family life is still part of an imaginary future for many Swedes in their mid-twenties, gender differences in planning for future family life and work/family priorities may contribute to a reproduction of a gender-unequal division of responsibility for domestic work, care of children, and paid work.

## Processes of identity development between ages 25 and 29

Study II was concerned with the processes involved in identity development. Identity development was first investigated in terms of identity status change and second, more specifically, in terms of how people with an established sense of identity continue to evolve their identities even after commitments have been made. Overall, the findings from Study II showed that identity development is an ongoing process that continues in the late twenties, beyond identity achievement. Stability in identity status was a typical pattern for participants assigned to all identity statuses except moratorium; but even when no identity status change occurred, identity development continued after the establishment of identity-defining commitments.

### Three dimensions of identity development after commitment making

Study II suggests that identity development after commitment making may be understood through the consideration of three dimensional processes: individuals' approach to changing life conditions, the extent to which they continue to engage in meaning making, and how they continue to develop their personal life direction.

The first dimension, approach to changing life conditions, describes the participants' approach to the fact that life inevitably changes as time goes by. The weakening endpoint of this dimension represents an unwillingness or incapacity to reform and adjust the identity narrative in relation to life changes, whereas the deepening endpoint represents a proneness and capacity to reformulate and adjust one's identity narrative between the interview occasions. This dimension shows some similarities to Bosma and Kunnen's (2001) and Whitbourne and colleagues' (2002) research on how people maintain and develop their identity commitments through accommodation and assimilation when faced with conflict between these commitments and the context. In line with Whitbourne and colleagues' (2002) suggestions that people may have established a predominant identity process style the results from Study II showed that proneness and capacity to reformulate and

adjust one's identity narrative between the interview occasions were connected to identity achievement, whereas only participants in foreclosure showed an unwillingness or incapacity to reform and adjust the identity narrative in relation to life changes.

Bosma and Kunnen (2001) suggest that both assimilation and accommodation are involved in changes in identity commitments. When faced with conflicting experiences people will first try to assimilate, but if this fails the conflict will remain. Repeated experiences of unresolved conflicts will then result in a weakened identity commitment, which may lead to change in the commitment. The findings in Study II, however, showed that many participants had made smaller adjustments in their identity commitments between the interview occasions without referring to times of doubt or a weakening of their identity commitments. Thus, it could be that the weakening of identity commitments, as described by Bosma & Kunnen (2001), does not always precede identity change; it may be that change can also occur through a gradual evolvment of already existing commitments, as they are applied in different situations across time. The present study gives an indication of this kind of development, but further, more long-term, research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of how gradual change in identity commitments might occur.

Meaning making, the second dimension in the model of identity development after identity commitments have been made, is a central concept in narrative research on identity (e.g., McLean & Thorne, 2003). The findings in Study II were consistent with studies that show how greater narrative processing and more personally meaningful stories are connected to identity achievement (Alisat & Pratt, 2012; McLean & Pratt, 2006). In contrast to much previous research, this thesis focused on increases in elements of meaning making between the interview occasions rather than the specific amount of meaning included in a specific identity narrative. Thus, in addition to confirming previous findings, the longitudinal analyses in the present study also suggest that continued meaning making could be a process through which individuals maintain and evolve an achieved sense of identity across time.

The third dimension identified in this thesis, development of personal life direction, describes changes in individuals' ability to make independent decisions in relation to social norms and expectations from others. As such, this dimension shows similarities with the development of agency as described in narrative research (Adler, 2012; McAdams, Hoffman, Day, & Mansfield, 1996), and with conventional and post-conventional moral reasoning as described in Kohlberg's (1976) stages of moral development. This study shows that in their late twenties, individuals who maintained an achieved sense of identity across time often increased their agency to act and ability to make independent choices in relation to social norms. This suggests that identity achievement is associated not only with post-conventional

moral reasoning (Jespersen, Kroger, & Martinussen, 2013), but also with the continued development of moral reasoning. Regarding individuals assigned to foreclosure, the findings were less clear. However, the results suggest that even individuals who are stable in foreclosure may sometimes develop their personal life direction further, without ever engaging in identity exploration.

### How the three dimensions work together in identity development

The three dimensions identified in Study II interact in individuals' identity development. Many participants' case summaries were assigned to categories on the same side of the model on all three dimensions — either deepening, weakening or in the middle. However, more complex patterns of development across the model were also found among the participants (see Figure 4 on page 43). This suggests that the three dimensions are closely related, but also that each of them represents distinct aspects of identity development.

Being assigned to the weakening endpoint of any of the dimensions was associated with constraints in identity development. This was especially apparent with regard to the first two dimensions in the model, approach to changing life conditions and meaning making. Participants could have changed and evolved their identity narrative between the interview occasions, but if they did not engage in meaning making their commitments appeared shallow and loosely embedded in their personal history. These findings are in line with a narrative perspective on identity development that suggests that when individuals experience life changes they need to incorporate these changes as meaningful parts of their life stories (e.g., McAdams & Cox, 2010). However, the present study also indicates that meaning making alone does not result in further identity development. That is, for participants who did not combine their meaning making with an ability to adjust their identity narrative to contextual change, the rigidity of their identity narratives appeared to hinder deepening of their identity narratives. These results may be understood in the light of recent narrative research that implies that meaning making is not always associated with positive outcomes (Greenhoot & McLean, 2013). For example, the incoherence between people's view of themselves and their actions described in the weakening endpoint of the approach to changing life conditions dimension in this study resembles problems that appear to be associated with a frequent dismissal of experiences that conflict with one's sense of identity as 'not like me' experiences (Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007). This suggests that if meaning making is not combined with the ability to reform the identity narrative, it might contribute to increased incoherence between individuals' sense of identity and experiences in everyday life, rather than continued identity development.

The results from Study II suggest that there are differences between how individuals assigned to identity achievement and foreclosure develop their identities

after establishing identity-defining commitments. Almost all participants in this study who were assigned to identity achievement at both ages 25 and 29 showed clear signs of deepening their identity narrative on two or all three of the dimensions of identity development. This is in line with Valde's (1996) suggestion that individuals with an achieved identity need to maintain openness to new experiences and continue reconsidering their commitments, in order for these commitments not to become inflexible and rigid across time. Previous research also shows that individuals assigned to identity achievement in college tended to have tried out new things and taken on new challenges by ages 33 and 43 (Josselson, 1996). In addition to confirming these findings from previous research, Study II in the present thesis also identified three dimensions through which such further identity development after the making of identity commitments may be described.

A weakening of the identity narrative on one or two of the three dimensions was almost exclusively associated with identity foreclosure at both ages. These results may be connected to recent findings that suggest that identity processes measuring exploration (i.e., identity achievement) and commitment (i.e., identity achievement and foreclosure) are associated with different kinds of personal growth initiative (Luyckx & Robitschek, 2014). That is, commitment processes are mainly associated with planning for personal growth, whereas exploration processes are associated with intentional behavior aimed at actually producing growth. This suggests that although identity commitments are central for structuring development, exploration processes may be associated with actually making further development happen. Even so, in Study II many participants assigned to foreclosure were coded to the middle of the model for identity development after the making of identity commitment, and some showed a deepening of the identity narrative on one or two dimensions. The importance of previous exploration for further identity development after a sense of identity has been established might be connected to when and in what way contextual changes in individuals' lives occur. Individuals assigned to foreclosure might be able to maintain and even evolve their sense of identity without having to engage in the process of identity exploration, as long as they keep up with their plan for 'how life is supposed to be'. In fact, individuals are unlikely to engage in identity exploration if it does not appear necessary, since it is a challenging psychological process (Kroger, 1996). Further, the diversity of patterns across the three dimensions could be due to differences in firmness and flexibility among individuals assigned to foreclosure. Kroger (1995) has suggested a distinction between 'developmental' and 'firm' foreclosure. For individuals with developmental foreclosure, this identity status is only the starting point for further identity development. Individuals assigned to firm foreclosure, on the other hand, are more rigid and less likely to develop their identity beyond the foreclosed identity status. It is possible that among the participants in Study II some had a more firmly

foreclosed identity, whereas others could evolve their identities without ever exploring different identity-defining alternatives.

### Other patterns of stability and change in identity status

Apart from stability in identity status after commitment making, 12 other patterns of stability in change in identity status between ages 25 and 29 were identified in Study II. Only one in four participants showed progressive identity status change (according to Waterman's [1982] developmental order of the identity statuses). Thus, almost a third of the participants either showed regressive identity status between the ages or were stable in moratorium (only one participant) or identity diffusion.

A few participants ( $n = 6$ ) regressed to disequilibrium (Kroger, 1996); that is, changed from identity achievement to moratorium. It can be considered surprising that this was not more common, given that a cyclic movement between achieved commitments and moratorium exploration (MAMA cycles) is expected to be a common pattern of further identity development after commitment making (e.g., Kroger, 1996; Stephen et al., 1992). It might be that the design of the present study, with four years between data collections, is not optimal for detecting this movement. Four years is a rather long time; thus, it is possible that some participants had passed through several MAMA cycles between the interview occasions. Even so, the results from the analyses of interview narratives by participants who were assigned to identity achievement at both ages 25 and 29 suggest that the maintenance and further development of achieved identity commitments involve more processes and may sometimes be more gradual than the MAMA cycles imply. Thus, overall, the findings in Study II suggest that MAMA cycles are a rough estimate that is not always accurate for describing how people continue their identity development after making identity commitments.

A surprisingly large group of participants ( $n = 17$ ) regressed to rigidification (Kroger, 1996); that is, changed out of identity achievement or moratorium to identity foreclosure between the interview occasions. These movements are theoretically puzzling, as they imply that people communicated an exploration of alternatives before commitment making at age 25, but communicated unexplored commitments at age 29. According to Kroger (1996), this movement can occur when a new wave of identity exploration is hindered for some reason. Moreover, the results from Study II suggest that continued identity development might be needed to maintain an achieved sense of identity across time, since people assigned to identity achievement at both ages 25 and 29 generally showed an adjustment to their identity commitment, an increase in meaning making, and further development of their personal life direction between the interview occasions. However, because people who regressed to rigidification between the occasions were not included in

the analysis of stability and change in the identity narratives, the causality of this relationship cannot be confirmed. Thus, further research is needed to gain a better understanding of what characterizes a regression to rigidification.

The third type of regression, to disorganization (Kroger, 1996) – that is, into identity diffusion from any other identity status – was not a common movement among the participants in the present study. No participants moved from identity achievement to identity diffusion, and only a small group ( $n = 4$  out of 39) moved from foreclosure to identity diffusion. However, proportionally more participants ( $n = 4$  out of 18) who were in moratorium at age 25 had regressed to disorganization compared with those assigned to other identity statuses at this age. Previous research has shown that moratorium is connected to higher levels of distress and psychological symptoms than the other statuses (e.g., Schwartz, Zamboanga, et al., 2013); thus, it may be suggested that unresolved long-term moratoriums could shift into a state of identity diffusion. In fact, in this study only half of the participants assigned to moratorium at age 25 had made the expected progress to identity achievement by age 29.

Among participants assigned to identity diffusion at age 25, the most likely development was to stay in identity diffusion at age 29. Seven participants, all men, followed this developmental trajectory. Further analysis showed, surprisingly, that these participants reported few signs of psychological distress (Carlsson, Wängqvist, Frisé, 2015). This suggests that these men resemble the subcategories of identity diffusion described as carefree (Luyckx et al., 2005; Marcia, 1989) or culturally adaptive (Born, 2007; Marcia, 1989). The subcategory of carefree diffusion has been described as representing individuals who are, or at least appear to be, “happily uncommitted” (Schwartz et al., 2011, p. 841); they like to take each day as it comes, and keep their options open. It has been proposed that in certain times and in certain groups of people these capacities may be culturally rewarding. Wängqvist and Frisé have suggested that this might be the case among, particularly male, emerging adults in Sweden, as it corresponds well with the norms and popular views on this life stage (Wängqvist & Frisé 2011; Wängqvist, 2013). However, these authors also suggest that the adaptive characteristics of identity diffusion might not last in the long term, since the social tolerance of people with loosely defined commitments might diminish as they get older and are expected to take on more of the responsibilities connected to adult life. Thus, my colleagues and I decided to further examine stability and change between these diffused participants’ interview narratives from ages 25 and 29, asking the question of whether the apparent ‘carefreeness’ is the whole story of stability in identity diffusion in the late twenties (Carlsson, Wängqvist, Frisé, 2015). In short, the results from these investigations show that remaining in identity diffusion may be described through dimensions similar to those identified in Study II; that is, people’s approach to changing life

conditions, the extent to which they engage in meaning making, and how they develop their personal life direction. Results showed diversity in what it means to stay in identity diffusion in the late twenties, but general trends were avoiding commitment making in relation to life changes, making little new meaning, and often becoming increasingly dependent on the random course of events. Thus, it may be suggested that although identity diffusion in the late twenties may appear 'carefree' (e.g., Luyckx et al., 2005; Marcia, 1989), it is sometimes far from it.

To summarize, the investigations of processes of identity development between ages 25 and 29 conducted in Study II showed that identity development is an ongoing process that may continue in the late twenties, also beyond identity achievement. Even though stability in status between measuring points was a typical pattern for individuals assigned to all identity statuses except moratorium, the findings suggest that staying in the same identity status after commitments have been made is an active developmental process. Identity development, thus, involves more processes than those captured by changes in identity status and, perhaps paradoxically, further evolvment appears to be a key process through which an established sense of identity can be maintained.

## Comparing the identity status model and the dual-cycle model

Study III compares the identity status model and the dual-cycle model of identity formation. Even though both these models are based on the theoretical framework from the identity status model and apply similar terminology, before Study III, examinations of the associations between these two models have been scant.

### The dual-cycle model and Swedish young adults

The results from Study III indicated that the processes of identity development suggested in the dual-cycle model were not a sufficient representation of the participants' ratings on the Swedish version of the DIDS. When the DIDS was applied in a Swedish socio-cultural context, the items measuring the identity process exploration in depth accounted for two different aspects: exploration in depth characterized by evaluation, and exploration in depth characterized by reconsideration. This separation between different aspects of the exploration in depth scale has previously been suggested by Zimmerman and colleagues (2015) when validating the DIDS in Switzerland and France. However, the factorial validation of the DIDS in Study III indicated that, even when differentiating between six processes of identity development, the factorial model was only a marginally acceptable reflection of the participants' ratings in the DIDS. Thus, the



results could not confirm either the five- or six-process version of the dual-cycle model of identity formation, as measured with the DIDS, among Swedish young adults. It is possible that this is because the dual-cycle model is not a proper model for identity development among Swedish young adults. However, several factors indicate that this may mainly be a case of measurement issues. That is, a correlation of error terms for three pairs of items which were very similar in content had to be allowed in order for the model to be even marginally acceptable. Many of the items in the DIDS are also extremely similar in content, sometimes even across the different processes measured. Furthermore, the DIDS has been translated into several different languages, and problems with different parts of the scale have occurred in some of these validations as well. Perhaps the most evident of these is the split of the exploration in depth scale that was necessary in the French version (Zimmermann et al., 2015), but another example is that it has been necessary to exclude items from the exploration scales in a study including American and Turkish participants (Eryigit & Kerpeleman, 2011). Moreover, very high correlations ( $>.80$ ) between commitment making and identification with commitment were found in the same study. This suggests that what these two scales measure is something very similar, at least in some cultural settings.

Turning to identity status as derived from the dual-cycle model processes of identity development, only four of the identity status groups derived from the DIDS in this study corresponded with status groups identified in previous studies (foreclosure, ruminative moratorium, carefree diffusion, and undefined). To our surprise no achievement status, defined as high on all identity processes except ruminative exploration in previous studies using the DIDS, was identified. However, two additional statuses, named reconsideration type moratorium and exploration type moratorium, were found. These two statuses showed similarities with both dual-cycle achievement and moratorium. That is, like most moratorium groups identified in previous studies, the most apparent trait of both the new moratoriums identified in Study III was high levels on different kinds of exploration, in relation to the other identity statuses. This was paired with intermediate to somewhat elevated levels on both dual-cycle commitment scales. However, in contrast to previous studies, none of the new moratoriums showed high levels of ruminative exploration, which is more in line with achievement as defined in previous studies using the dual-cycle model. Moreover, because the mean score on both commitment dimensions was fairly high for all participants (see Table 6, page 47), the intermediate to somewhat elevated levels on these dimensions indicated that these participants in the two new moratoriums have some level of identity commitments. Because no previous studies deriving identity status from the DIDS have focused exclusively on people in their late twenties, this suggests that compared with adolescents and emerging adults, groups of young adults might maintain an

openness to their identity commitments, emphasizing either a reconsideration or an exploration of alternative commitments, but without expressing many ruminative tendencies. However, these results should be interpreted with caution since the factorial validation in Study III indicated that the processes of identity development suggested in the dual-cycle model were not a sufficient representation of the participants' ratings on the Swedish version of the DIDS. Moreover, regarding the comparison with identity status as defined in previous studies using the DIDS to derive identity statuses, it needs to be taken into account that, as shown in the introduction, the exact characteristics of any particular status have been rather loosely defined in previous work. That is, process patterns that are in fact rather inconsistent have been referred to as being the same identity status.

### Associations between the identity status model and the dual-cycle model of identity formation

The results from Study III showed that the associations between people's identity development as studied with the identity status interview and as studied with the DIDS were even smaller than what could be expected from previous research, and given that both models are based on the theoretical framework from the identity status model. Thus, these findings indicate that the identity status interview and the DIDS largely measured different things.

All correlations between the identity processes measured in the identity status model and the dual-cycle model were small to moderate, and few participants were assigned to the same identity status with the identity status interview and the DIDS. Only participants who were assigned to moratorium or identity diffusion with the identity status interview were more likely than expected by chance to be assigned to the corresponding statuses as assessed with the DIDS (ruminative moratorium and carefree diffusion). Moreover, participants in identity status interview identity achievement were more likely than expected by chance to be in dual-cycle foreclosure. This could be expected from the different temporal focus in the identity status interview and the DIDS. In contrast to the identity status interview, the DIDS does not account for past aspects of identity exploration. Thus, individuals with strong commitments and a history of exploration but little present exploration should be assigned to identity achievement with the identity status interview but to foreclosure with the DIDS.

When the dual-cycle processes were plotted across the four identity statuses assessed with the identity status interview the patterns were modest, but generally in line with what could be theoretically expected. Interestingly, participants in identity achievement show somewhat elevated levels of exploration. This indicates that people in identity achievement continue to explore their identities after making identity commitments, which is in line with the results from Study II. A notable

exception to the theoretical expectations, however, was that participants assigned to foreclosure with the identity status interview showed only average levels of both commitment processes in the dual-cycle model. This may be connected to the fact that in the DIDS the commitment processes are measured as choices regarding abstract constructs, such as ‘my future plans’ and ‘direction’, without connection to specific life contexts (Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008). This phrasing, asking people whether they have made decisions about ‘future plans’ and ‘direction’, frames commitments as conscious choices. This contrasts with the definition of foreclosure in the identity status model, as it entails viewing commitments as given ways of living rather than active choices (e.g., Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia et al., 1993). Thus, these findings underscore the significance of taking into account the contexts and contents of people’s identities when studying identity development.

The findings in Study III identify strengths and weaknesses of both the identity status model and the dual-cycle model. Concerning the dual-cycle model, the results could not confirm either the five- or six-process version of this model as measured with the DIDS, among Swedish young adults. However, based on the findings in this study it is possible to suggest that this may be because of measurement issues. Moreover, the modest associations found between similar processes measured with the DIDS and the identity status interview suggested that the DIDS only moderately corresponds with the identity status framework, which it is based on and shares terminology with. Thus, based on the results from this study it may be suggested that the DIDS needs to be thoroughly evaluated on the item level in order to investigate how well it reflects both the theoretical dual-cycle model and identity development itself.

Turning to the identity status interview, the findings in this study indicated that people in identity achievement continue to explore their identities after making identity commitments. However, how these processes contribute to peoples’ identity development was not possible to determine with the identity status interview, since the coding of the interview narratives was limited to a single coding into one of four identity statuses. Thus, it may be argued that when using the identity status interview, significant aspects of individuals’ identity development may be lost in the coding procedure. Because of the complexity of the information gathered in the identity status interview, a suggestion for future research is therefore to keep the interview format but develop coding procedures that account for more of the complexity in individual identity development.

In conclusion, Study III could not confirm the processes in the dual-cycle model as a sufficient representation of the participants’ ratings on the DIDS. Furthermore, the overlap between identity development as studied with the identity status model and the dual-cycle model was surprisingly small, given that they are both based on the framework from the identity status model. Similar terminology is

also used in both models, but they do not always describe the same concepts. Thus, the findings in this study call for a thorough reconsideration of what the identity status terminology actually means within the different models, what the identity status interview and the DIDS really measure, and how these models reflect people's identity development.

## Contents and processes of identity development

The dimensions identified in Study II in the present thesis describe how people may deal with changing life conditions through the adjustment of identity contents (Dimension 1, approach to changing life conditions), but also that they need to process changes in content in relation to their current sense of identity (Dimension 2, meaning making). Thus, this study illustrates how contents and processes are intertwined in people's identity development and are not always easily separated. In the following, I will address the interaction of contents and processes in identity development, and describe how the results from this thesis contribute to the understanding of this matter.

The underlying assumption of the identity status model is that as long as the identity domains used in a study can be considered salient to the participants, their exploration of and commitment to these life areas will reflect their underlying sense of identity (Marcia, 1966, 2007). This might be one of the reasons why, as suggested by Syed and McLean (2015), potential differences have often not been recognized when it comes to how people develop their identities within different identity domains depending on what they actually talk about within each domain. Research shows that people generally follow a fairly similar trajectory of exploration and commitment across different identity domains (Kunnen, 2010). However, because exploration and commitment are broad constructs that contain many different aspects, an issue that has been raised is whether particularly the characteristics of exploration might differ between identity domains and depending on the actual content of a person's identity (e.g., Grotevant, 1987). For example, results indicate that ethnic identity exploration may be described through two dimensions: participation and search (Syed et al., 2013). Moreover, development in different identity domains might intersect, and the salience of different identity domains might differ both within the individual across time and between different groups (e.g., Grotevant, 1987). Study I shows that having identity commitments in an identity domain does not necessarily mean that this domain is particularly important for a person's current process of identity development. To most participants in this study, their willingness to become parents was self-evident; 80% of them were assigned to a committed identity status in this domain (22.7% to identity

achievement and 57.6% to foreclosure; Frisé & Wängqvist, 2011). However, the content analysis showed that most participants did not appear to have given parenthood much thought yet, and many spoke of parenthood as something distant that did not concern them in their everyday lives. Thus, for most of them, this identity domain was not particularly salient for their current overall sense of identity, even though they were committed to having children in the future.

In comparison with the parental identity domain, the content of the work/family priority domain showed greater variation. Almost all participants had some idea of how they wanted to prioritize between work and family in their lives, but the level of detail and description of how they wanted to handle future work/family conflict differed between people. However, the work/family priority identity domain is a bit different from many other domains used in the identity status interview. That is, not only can work/family priorities be treated as an individual identity domain, within which people can explore possible solutions to work/family conflict and commit to a chosen direction; it also explicitly involves the process of integrating two identity domains which may have conflicting interests — the work domain and the family domain.

One of the foundations of Erikson's theory of identity development is the development of a feeling of being the same across different life areas (Erikson, 1968). Thus, the integration of identity contents from different life areas is considered to be a crucial process in the development and maintenance of a coherent sense of identity (Syed & McLean, 2015; van Hoof & Raaijmakers, 2003). It has been suggested, however, that the amount of conflict between identity domains that people experience and how they integrate their identities may differ between people in relation to, for example, social contexts and individual differences (Lilgendahl, 2015). Even so, to this date few studies have been concerned with how people integrate different identity domains (e.g., Archer, 1985; Schachter, 2004; Syed, 2010). These studies suggest that people might differ both in how they integrate different identity domains, and in how important this integration is to their overall identity development. Schachter (2004) suggests that the actual integration of different identity domains is only one of several possible solutions to conflicting interests in the different domains. People may also solve conflicts between the domains by choosing to identify with only one of them and suppress the other, by identifying with both and accepting the ongoing conflict, or by embracing conflicting identity contents, which may result in an experience of the thrill of dissonance. Similar results, that some people keep the contents in different identity domains separate, were also found in a study of how college students' ethnic identity was related to their choice of college major (Syed, 2010).

The content analysis in Study I shows how Swedish emerging adults negotiate the future relationship between work and family in different ways. Most

apparent is that half of the participants wanted to prioritize either work or family over the other, which suggests that at this point in their life they anticipate that, when faced with future work/family conflict, they will solve this conflict by choosing to mainly identify with one of these domains and suppress the other. However, about a third of the participants, mostly women, talked about wanting to prioritize both work and family equally. It might be that all these participants strive to completely integrate the different identity domains, but it is also possible that some of them accept an ongoing conflict between their work and family contents, or even embrace having conflicting identity contents. Either way, further investigation of how people solve work/family conflict, and how this changes across the lifespan, could be a way to learn more about how people integrate (or do not integrate) the contents of different identity domains.

An issue that needs to be raised in relation to this is whether integration between different identity domains is a necessary part of the development and maintenance of a coherent sense of identity. Erikson (1966) describes identity coherence as a feeling of being the same across time and space. However, across the lifespan people may identify with a large set of commitments and social roles. At different times in life they will also leave old identifications behind, whereas other ones may change form and evolve over the years. Even so, people may maintain a feeling of being the same across time. McLean and colleagues (2014) argue that this continuity is best captured through narrative identity processes, through which elements of changing identification can also be worked into a coherent life story. In the same study, these authors also find that meaning making was more common in identity narratives that included multiple identity contents compared with single-content stories. This may suggest that narrative processing is important for the integration of different identity contents. However, a question that might be raised is whether, in the same way that narrative processing can work elements of change across time into a coherent story, it is also possible that the narration of different identity contents can create stories about how conflicting identity contents are kept disintegrated, or stories that allow for contradicting elements in one's own person. As previously mentioned, Kegan (1982, 2003) describes how during adulthood some people who develop a certain distance from their own theories and ideologies, such as identity commitments, are able to hold on to and relate to multiple theories and contradicting ideologies. Kegan describes how these people act as coordinators of the activities associated with their different commitments, such as work and family, rather than as if they were their commitments and social roles. In such a case it is possible to suggest that people might be able to experience a sense of sameness in this coordinating person, even when different identity contents are in conflict.

In sum, this discussion of contents and processes in identity development suggests that when studying identity development more attention needs to be paid to

how its contents and processes are intertwined, and that people may not develop their identities in different life areas through the same processes. Moreover, further investigations of how people develop their identities need to focus not only on general development, but also on which life areas and contents people consider important to their identity development, and on how these contents are coordinated and integrated with each other.

## Development in the late twenties: Evolving identities

The results from this thesis indicate that, although there is individual diversity, many young Swedes move into adult life between ages 25 and 29. That is, the results from Study I indicate that in their mid-twenties many young Swedish people may still be considered emerging adults, especially in their relation to a future family life, and the contextual changes in love and work between ages 25 and 29 indicate that as they move closer to 30 many of them have taken large steps into adult life. These results are therefore in line with Arnett's (2012) suggestion that in many post-industrial countries, such as Sweden, emerging adulthood often continues into the late twenties.

The participants' transition into adult social roles may be connected to findings in Study II. This study showed that stability in identity status was the most likely developmental trajectory for participants assigned to all identity statuses, except moratorium. As people move into the more long-term social roles of adulthood, the main focus of their psychosocial development is expected to shift from being mainly focused on their own identity to how the person, with this identity, may act in relation to a partner, children, and younger generations (Erikson, 1968). Thus, it has been suggested that people move into a time of role immersion (Arnett, 2012), focused on actually living their adult commitments rather than defining them. In light of this, it might be that when individuals are engaging in their new adult roles, they are less likely to devote time and energy to the further exploration of different identity alternatives and commitment making, which is the basis for identity status change.

Even so, the studies in this thesis also indicate that even people who do not change identity status in their late twenties continue to evolve their identities. That is, the results from Study III indicate that many participants engage in identity exploration at age 29 as well. Moreover, the findings in Study II emphasize that after making identity commitments, people maintain and evolve their identities through active developmental processes, also beyond identity achievement. Indeed, this age has previously been described as a time for identity consolidation as it often involves a need to evaluate and accommodate abstract identity commitment when

faced with the concrete reality (e.g., Pals, 1999). For example, when people become parents they need to adjust their image of what it could be like to be a parent to the reality of actually having children. The dimensions identified in Study II indicate that this evaluation does not have to involve a crisis whereby old commitments are overthrown. Rather, it is possible that it can often be described as a gradual process whereby parts of an identity commitment can be changed and evolved in relation to changes in life, the meaning of new roles can be considered in relation to previous attitudes and experiences, and a personal life direction may be further developed.

An issue that needs to be raised is whether this kind of evolvment is specific to people in their late twenties, or if similar findings can also be expected among older adults. It may be suggested that this process of identity development is partly connected to the specific conditions of the late twenties. During this time of life the need to integrate new elements occurs frequently for many, since, as the descriptive data show, role transitions are common at this age. However, for many people the adult role transitions do not happen all at once but are rather stretched out across both the late twenties and the thirties. For example, the vast majority of the participants in this thesis held adult occupational roles at age 29, but only about a third of them had or were expecting children. Assuming that most of them still want to have children at this age (Study I showed that almost everyone wanted this at age 25), many of them are likely to be well into their thirties before they take on the role of parent. Therefore, it may be suggested that for many, the need to evolve their identities in relation to new social roles continues into young adulthood. Concerning older adults, previous research on identity development in middle age suggests that in adulthood this development often takes place through the exploration and understanding of negative life events (Lilgendahl, 2015). Thus, it is possible that the dimensions describing identity development after the making of identity commitment in Study II might not be sufficient to describe identity development among people in middle age or among older adults. Therefore, more long-term research is needed to determine whether the dimensions identified in Study II are sufficient to describe identity development among people past their late twenties as well.

## Methodological discussion

This thesis uses combinations of qualitative and quantitative methods to study identity development among people in their late twenties. This mixed methods approach (e.g., Lieber & Weisner, 2010) offers an opportunity to study both specific aspects of people's identity development and general trends among larger groups. Especially in Studies I and II, an iterative approach was taken to the identity status



interviews, meaning that when questions emerged from quantitative studies of identity status coding my co-authors and I have returned to the qualitative interview material with these questions. Thus, using interviews to study identity development has great advantages compared to survey measures. However, despite the broad possibilities of the interview method, it also has methodological limitations.

An issue that has been raised about the use of interviews when studying identity is that the participants' ability to verbally express themselves may affect the identity status assessment (van Hoof, 1999). However, the identity status interview manual is designed to limit the risk of confounding identity development with verbal ability (Marcia et al., 1993). A further concern that has been raised is that the characteristics of the interviewer might have an impact on the participants' interview answers, or that the relationship between interviewer and interviewee might affect the assessment of identity status (Bourne, 1978). To avoid the impact of these limitations, the coding manual for the identity status interview emphasizes the importance of clinical sensitivity and training (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Thus, all interviewers who worked with the data collection received special interview training before meeting with the participants. Furthermore, all interviewers were well educated in psychological interviewing and had previous interview experience.

Another problem with the identity status interview is that when analyzed according to the coding manual it only assesses identity status categorically. Other methods for assessing identity status have thus been suggested, for example rating identity exploration and commitment on continuous scales and assigning identity status according to these ratings (Grotevant, Thorbecke, & Meyer, 1982), or rating the presence of each identity status on a continuous scale (MacKinnon & Marcia, 2002). This approach was used in the GoLD data collection at age 29 as a complement to the categorical assessment, as this would allow for the use of both categorical and continuous measures when studying identity status. Moreover, it allows for studies of the exploration and commitment processes, as used in Study III.

Despite the problems associated with the coding of the identity status interview and the interview format in general, the use of interviews offers an opportunity to study the complexity of identity development from different angles. Moreover, compared with survey measures investigating general paths of identity development, the participants' identity narratives can capture their identity development in their own words, embedded in the individual and cultural meaning given to the subjects discussed.

In addition to the identity status interview, Study III also included a survey measure for the dual-cycle model of identity formation, the DIDS (Luyckx, Schwartz, et al., 2008). Problems associated with this measure have been discussed in previous sections and will not be repeated here. A limitation in the validation of

the DIDS in a Swedish cultural context is that for this kind of analysis the number of participants included in the study may be considered a bit small. However, with regard to the comparison between the identity status model and the dual-cycle model, as well as the analysis performed in Studies I and II, the relatively large number of identity status interviews is a strength of the studies in this thesis. Interviews are time-consuming, and the number of participants that can be included is therefore always limited. However, because this study was part of a larger longitudinal project whose participants were recruited over 30 years ago, the use of interviews did not affect the number of participants included in this study.

Other aspects worth discussing are the analytic methods used in the different studies. Studies I and II use different forms of qualitative coding. In developing the coding scheme in Study I, only thematic analysis was used. In Study II case study methodology was first used, followed by thematic analysis. In all coding procedures, it is important to be aware that the researcher's perception of the data influences the analysis. To limit the impact of a single researcher's preconceptions, reliability analyses were performed for all coding procedures in the studies included in this thesis, and when in doubt regarding specific cases these were discussed between the authors of the separate papers. Moreover, specifically the coding scheme in the longitudinal analysis in Study II was developed in close collaboration between the authors, moving back and forth between the interview material, the case summaries and the thematic structure.

In both Studies II and III, the EXACON procedure (Bergman et al. 2003) was used to study longitudinal pathways of identity status change and overlap between identity status codings from different measures. As this procedure entails a large number of significance tests, the significance level was adjusted in both these studies. In Study II the overall significance level was adjusted, and in Study III a two-step procedure was used. Both these procedures have pros and cons, as it can be argued that simply lowering the overall significance level is too lax whereas using the Bonferroni correction on unexpected patterns might be considered too strict and theoretically driven. Therefore, to maintain transparency the cross-tabulation tables are included in both these studies.

The methods used in the validation of the dual-cycle model in Sweden in Study III are also worth discussing. In the factorial validation of the DIDS, Study II relies on the same model fit indices and cutoff levels as used in previous validations of the DIDS (Crocetti et al., 2011; Luyckx et al., 2010; Zimmermann et al., 2015). However, this practice of relying mainly on approximate fit indexes and as low a chi square as possible is increasingly viewed as an unacceptable way of evaluating model fit (Kline, 2011). Instead, it has been proposed that more attention needs to be paid to the chi-square badness of fit test, and some authors even suggest that all models with significant chi-square values should be rejected (e.g. Barrett, 2007).

This is a very strict criterion, but at the very least a failed chi-square test needs to be “treated as an indication of a possible problem” (Kline, 2011, p. 202) that needs to be further investigated to explain why the model failed. Thus, models with failed chi-square tests should be thoroughly explored in all steps, including returning to how the theoretical construct under study are actually captured in the measures used.

The use of cluster analysis in Study III to identify different identity statuses also has its limitations. The naming of the different clusters is subjective, and the review of previous studies featured in the introduction section of this thesis also shows that the characteristics of clusters named after the same identity status may vary considerably between studies. To avoid contributing to this, the new clusters identified in Study III were named after the dimension on which the participants in a cluster scored the highest, in relation to participants in other clusters, rather than inventing new theoretical terms. Another methodological issue with cluster analysis is that when using this method the scoring pattern of each cluster is relative to the mean score in the specific group under study. This means that whether a single participant’s score on, for example, commitment making is considered high or low is dependent on the other participants’ scores on commitment making, rather than on the person’s absolute score. This limits the ability to compare cluster solutions between studies. One way to gain a fuller understanding of the meaning of the clusters could therefore be to take into account raw scores on the dimensions measured in the DIDS before naming the clusters. However, in previous studies that derive identity status clusters using the DIDS, the clusters are generally interpreted from standard scores. Therefore, because one of the main purposes of this study was to compare identity status as derived from the DIDS with identity status interview assignments, raw scores were not interpreted in Study III.

Another methodological issue with the studies included in this thesis is the generalizability of the findings. The possibility of cohort effects needs to be acknowledged; for example, the GoLD data collection at age 25 was performed in 2007-2008, before the last global financial crisis had fully evolved in Europe and more specifically Sweden. Thus, it is possible that the participants’ views of, for example, future possibilities at this age might be somewhat different than among young people today. Concerning the representativeness of the GoLD participants, they were considered to be fairly comparable with a representative sample of families in Gothenburg at beginning of the study, in 1982 (Lamb et al., 1988). However, the participants’ representativeness for their age group may have changed over the years. At age 25, a rough comparison with national statistic (Statistics Sweden, 2009b) indicated that having a university degree was more common among participants in this study than in a national sample of 25-year-olds (Wängqvist, 2013). Moreover, at age 29, a comparison with national statistics indicates that it was less common among the participants to have children at this age compared with

Swedish 30-year-olds in general (Statistics Sweden, 2014c). Only 36% of the participants had children, compared with 53% of 30-year-old Swedish women and 36% of 30-year-old Swedish men. However, it needs to be taken into account that at this age the vast majority of the participants lived in one of the three largest cities in Sweden (Stockholm, Gothenburg, or Malmö), where especially the age of first-time mothers is higher than in other parts of Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2013). Moreover, although this study does not include any explicit information on ethnic identity or cultural background, it is possible to assume that because the participants were recruited over 30 years ago at a very young age their diversity in these respects is smaller than in Swedish society in general today. An inclusion criterion at the beginning of the study was also that the participants' parents had to understand enough Swedish to be able to participate in interviews and surveys. It is difficult to estimate exactly how these specific characteristics of the GoLD participants have affected the outcome of the studies in this thesis; however, regardless of whether the representativeness of the sample has changed slightly since the beginning of the study, the GoLD has the advantage of being a community sample including participants from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and a very low dropout rate over a 30-year time period. This means that, compared with many studies of identity development in the twenties that focus exclusively on university students, the participants show great variety in social background, educational level, and occupational context.

## Conclusions

The general aim of this thesis was to further the understanding of identity development by studying aspects of the content and process of identity among people in their late twenties.

First, Study I, which concerned identity content in the specific domains of parenthood and priorities between work and family, indicates that wanting to have children is normative among Swedish emerging adults. However, many participants spoke about parenthood as something distant that did not concern them in their everyday lives. Thus, the results indicate that for most Swedish emerging adults parenthood is not a particularly salient life area for their current overall sense of identity; even though many of them have strong commitments in this life area. The gender differences found indicate that women to a larger extent than men planned for and explored their work/family priority identities in their mid-twenties, even if actual family life was still far ahead. Thus, it may be suggested that how to combine work and family is a more salient part of one's identity for emerging adult women than for emerging adult men.

Second, concerning identity processes, Study II shows that identity development is an ongoing process that may continue in the late twenties, also beyond identity achievement. Although stability in status between measuring points was a typical pattern for individuals assigned to all identity statuses except moratorium, the findings in this study suggest that staying in the same identity status after commitments have been made is an active developmental process that may be described through the deepening and weakening of three dimensional processes: the ways in which individuals approach changing life conditions, the extent to which they continue to engage in meaning making, and how they continue to develop their personal life direction. A weakening in any of the dimensions was associated with different kinds of constraints in terms of identity development. Thus, the study shows that identity development involves more processes than those captured by changes in identity status and, perhaps paradoxically, the results indicate that in the late twenties further evolvement might be a key process through which an established sense of identity can stay adaptive and flexible.

Third, the comparison between the identity status model and the dual-cycle model of identity formation in Study III shows that there were some expected associations between the models, but that these were very modest, considering that the models are based on the same theoretical framework and use the same terminology. Thus, the findings indicate that the measures of the two compared models largely capture different things. Moreover, the results indicate that the processes of identity development suggested in the dual-cycle model were not a sufficient representation of the participants' ratings in the Swedish version of the measure used to study this model. Thus, the findings in this study call for a thorough reconsideration of what the identity status terminology actually means within the different models, of what the identity status interview and the measure of the dual-cycle model really measure, and of how these models reflect people's identity development.

Taken together, this thesis shows ways people in their late twenties may continue to actively evolve their identities as life unfolds. The results from the studies in this thesis also suggest that, in order to learn more about how people develop their identities, we need to combine and evaluate different theoretical approaches and research methods, and most importantly keep an open mind to what people tell us about their experiences.

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# APPENDIX

- I. Frisé, A., Carlsson, J., & Wängqvist, M. (2014). "Doesn't Everyone Want That? It's Just a Given": Swedish Emerging Adults' Expectations on Future Parenthood and Work/Family Priorities. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 29, 67-88. doi: 10.1177/0743558413502537
- II. Carlsson, J., Wängqvist, M., & Frisé, A. (2015). Identity development in the late twenties: A never ending story. *Developmental Psychology*, 51, 334-345. doi: 10.1037/a0038745
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