

# Youth Resilience and Well-Being During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Importance of Supporting Social Identity Development

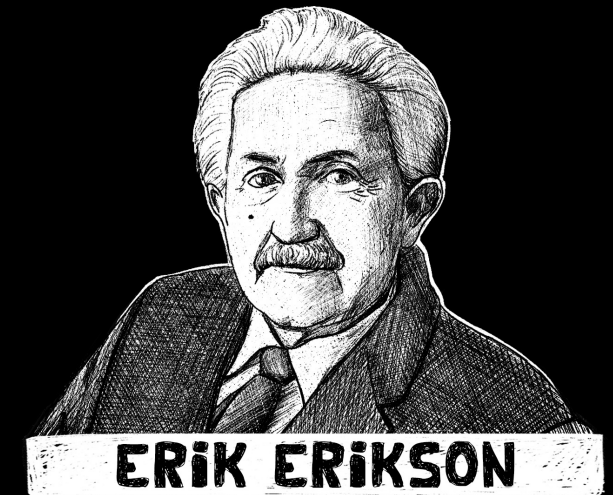
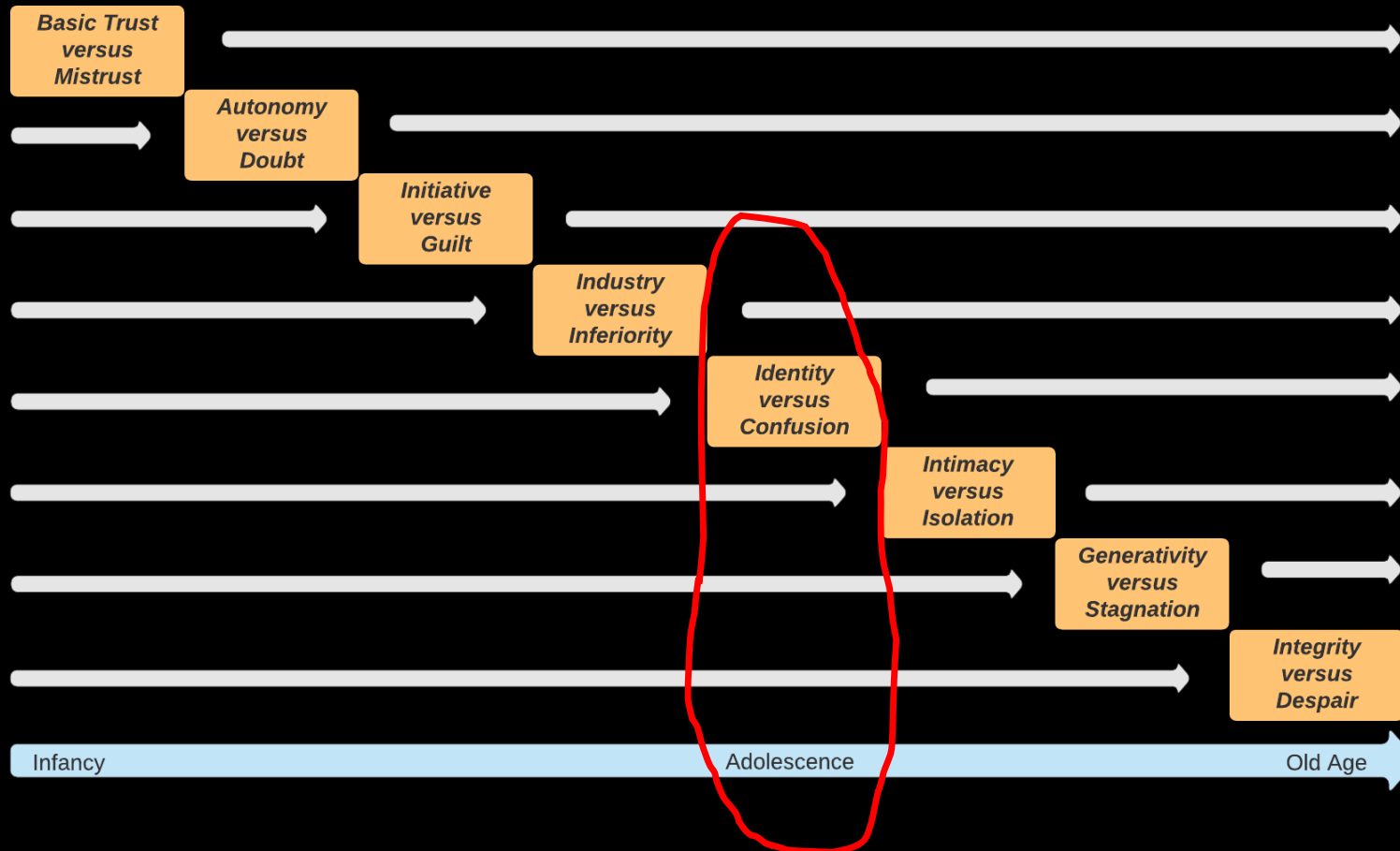
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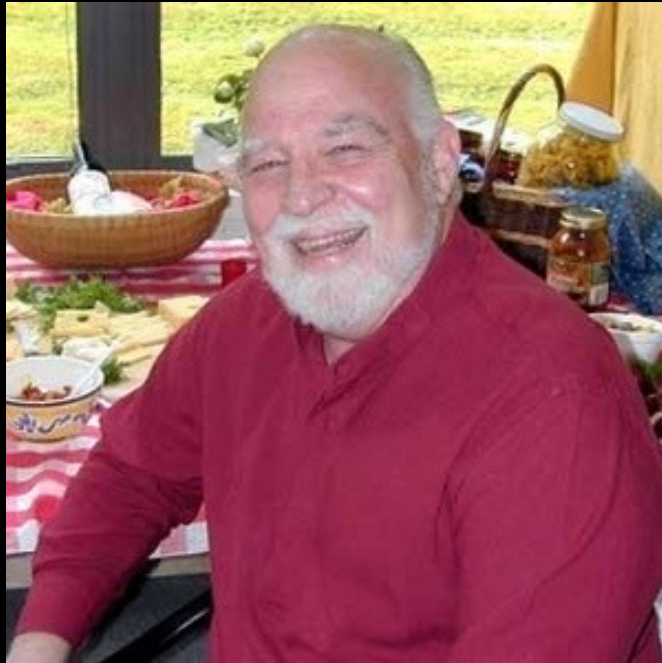


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# Identity Development in Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood



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James Marcia



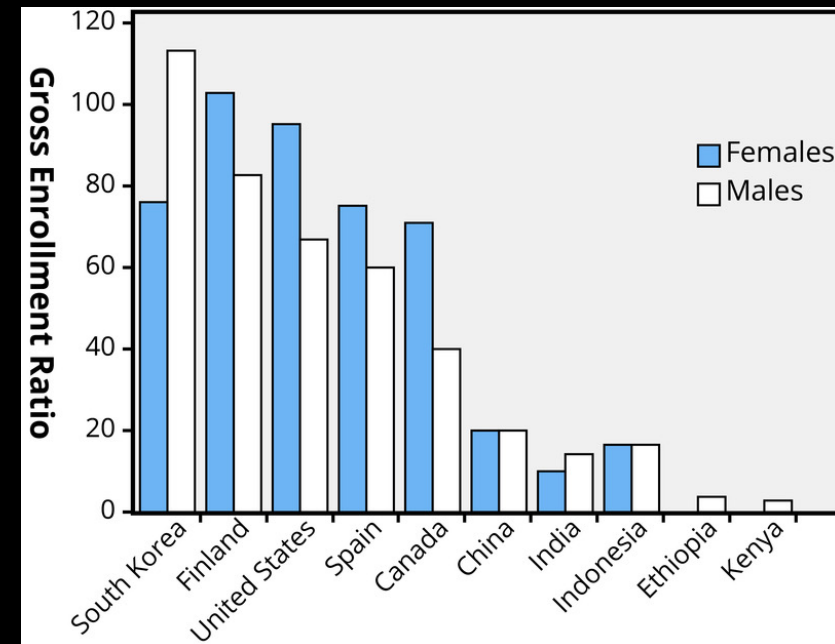
# Identity Development in Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood

Scholars like Jeffrey Arnett argue that identity exploration extends into emerging adulthood (ages 18-25 or 18-29, depending on who you ask)

The identity exploration that occurs in emerging adulthood tends to focus on the realms of work/career and love/relationships

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wm-lifespandevelopment/chapter/emerging-adulthood/>

- The concept of emerging adulthood itself is debated
- It is heavily influenced by culture
- Meaning the content and specifics of identity exploration and development occurring is also probably heavily influenced by cultural values



College enrollment rates in 2007 from 2010 UN data

# Social Identity and Group Identity

One vital aspect of adolescent identity development is social identity (sometimes discussed in combination with group identity)

Originating mostly with Henri Tajfel, part of how we perceive ourselves comes from the social groups we belong to

As youth begin to develop social identities they often:

Exaggerate/increase the perceived differences between in-groups and out-groups

Exaggerate/increase the perceived similarities among members of in-groups

Can lead to an “us versus them” mindset, proposed as a possible reason for discrimination, bias, and oppression (Best, 2004)

# Social Identity Is Not All Bad, Though...

While much scholarship on social identity focuses on how group membership and identity leads to negative group interactions (like the Robbers Cave Experiment)....

...quite a bit of research also suggests that healthy and strong social identities can produce positive individual outcomes

While people with mental illness who have a stronger social identity as someone with a mental illness report higher levels of stigma, they are also seek more help (Klik et al., 2019)

Teenagers with a greater sense of social capital are more likely to engage in positive bystander behavior  
(Jenkins & Fredrick, 2017)

Young people are less likely to use drugs if they don't see themselves as part of members of drug-using groups (e.g., Bakken et al., 2017)

Active civil engagement is related to healthy social identity among youth  
(Lannegrand-Willems et al., 2018)

# Resilience and Well-Being Predicted by Social Identity

Clear relationships between positive social identity and well-being/resilience

Positive social identity correlates with greater post-crisis social support (Drury et al., 2019)

Social identity is related to higher life satisfaction among emerging adults (Van Dick et al., 2017)

Sense of belonging directly relates to greater resilience (Scarf et al., 2016)

When important social identities are salient, people respond to trauma with greater resilience (Muldoon et al., 2020)

Ethnic and cultural identity increases academic motivation (Butler-Barnes et al., 2017)

Family identity and religious identity correlate with greater general wellbeing (Dimitrova et al., 2017)

We even know that making salient the right social identity can increase how many vegetables teenagers eat!

# Youth During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Young people are struggling with serious consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic:
  - Food insecurity
  - Education access
  - More housework/chores
  - Increased anxiety
  - Job prospects
  - Social isolation
  - General Stress
  - Increased obesity due to lack of physical activity
  - Decreased attention spans
  - Negative moods
  - Mental health
  - Social media use

- Baird et al, 2020; Cianfarani & Pampanini, 2020; Copeland et al., 2021; Nogueira-de-Almeida et al., 2020; Wray-Lake et al., n.d.



# Increasing Positive Social Identity Will Increase Well-Being and Resilience

Support from friends during COVID-19 relates to fewer internalizing problems

(Bernasco et al., 2021)

Belonging to groups that provide positive meaning and support can constitute a

“social cure” (Jetten et al., 2017)

Supporting youth as they create and develop positive social identities increases resilience and well-being (Koni et al., 2019)

So the **BIG** question: How do we do this during the COVID-19 pandemic?

# How Do We Support Positive Social Identities During COVID-19

- Evidence that online social groups create similar benefits as social identity based on in-person social groups
  - Also evidence that too much social media and/or online socializing has significant social harm, particularly for adolescents
- We need to explore how to balance the advantages and disadvantages of young people's social media use
  - How do we make sure this is benefiting adolescents who need the social support and strong social identity?

# How Do We Support Positive Social Identities During COVID-19

- We must harness positive social identity aspects for young people of the groups they already belong to
  - Family, religion, sports teams, etc.
- Social distancing during the pandemic is vital for people's physical health
  - It also led to social isolation for many people, which can have serious negative consequences (perhaps especially for young people)

# A Warning: Post COVID-19

As we very slowly move to a post-pandemic world, I have concerns about society ignoring the long-term consequences to young people's social, emotional, and psychological development

Because social identity and group identity is a vital aspect of healthy socioemotional development, we must consider how the last 2+ years of distancing and isolation is impacting adolescents – particularly those who are more vulnerable

Researchers, educators, parents, and policymakers must focus on longer-term social, emotional, and psychological consequences on young people's social and cognitive development

This might have to include discussions about:

- what we consider to be “normal” school progression
- focused and explicit support regarding identity development
- changes to institutional expectations for adolescents

# Questions and Discussion



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