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# Comparing psychological and sociological approaches to identity: identity status, identity capital, and the individualization process

JAMES E. CÔTÉ AND SETH J. SCHWARTZ

Psychologists have been studying identity processes at the intrapsychic level that resemble what sociologists have noted at the macro-societal level. Specifically, using the identity capital model introduced in previous issues of this journal (Côté, *Journal of Adolescence*, 19, 419–430; 20, 421–437), we explore a link between the psychologically oriented identity status paradigm, and the sociologically oriented individualization theory. The primary link between these two disciplinary approaches appears to be that the individualization process can be operationalized in terms of agency in identity formation. The relationship between agency and identity formation has been recognized by identity status researchers for some time, but primarily in terminology referring to the intrapsychic level; hence, in some respects, identity status researchers anticipated individualization theory. This link was empirically investigated in three studies of ethnically diverse samples. It was concluded, with a high degree of replication, that the identity statuses representing identity confusion (Diffusion) and identity synthesis (Achievement) appear to represent forms of default and developmental individualization, respectively. This comparison of similar elements between psychological and sociological perspectives may yield a richer understanding of identity formation processes, and help to pave the way for future interdisciplinary research.

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## Introduction

In their attempts to understand human identity, psychologists and sociologists have taken predictably different approaches, from principally intrapsychic and macro-social viewpoints, respectively (cf. Gecas and Burke, 1995). While these approaches have yielded some unique empirical and theoretical advances, we argue that they have also identified similar processes, but with different terminologies (cf. House, 1977, regarding this concurrence for social psychology in general). Findings from a series of studies will be reported that were designed to advance the interdisciplinary understanding of identity formation processes.

## A psychological approach: the identity status paradigm

The identity status paradigm is the best-known approach to the study of identity formation in psychology, dating back over 30 years (Marcia, 1966). Its central concepts — identity statuses—are derived from a typology based on the dimensions “exploration” and

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“commitment”, respectively: (a) the conscious (reflexive) deliberation of alternative goals, roles, and values and (b) the formation of consolidations of these deliberations as probable courses of future action.

Four identity statuses constitute this typology. The statuses were originally theorized to vary hierarchically in terms of levels of maturity of self-regulation and complexity of social functioning (Marcia, 1980). *Identity Diffusion* is generally considered the least mature and least complex status, reflecting apathy and lack of concern about directing one's present and future life. Individuals who remain Diffused beyond early or middle adolescence are prone to drug abuse, risky sexual behaviour, and academic failure (Jones and Hartmann, 1988; Jones, 1992, 1994; White, 2000). *Identity Foreclosure* is thought to be a somewhat more mature status than Identity Diffusion in that some form of commitment is embraced. However, Foreclosed individuals tend to show low developmental complexity associated with a conformist and obedient orientation, as evidenced by such tendencies as closed-mindedness and rigidity (Marcia, 1980; Berman *et al.*, 2001), and over-identifying with their parents (Côté and Levine, 1983; Adams *et al.*, 1987).

*Identity moratorium* is often considered a more functionally complex status than either Diffusion or Foreclosure, because the individual is purportedly taking proactive steps in autonomously considering identity alternatives. However, the maturity implied in the Moratorium status may be hampered by higher levels of anxiety (Kidwell *et al.*, 1995) and uncertainty (Meeus, 1996; Meeus *et al.*, 1999) associated with what is ostensibly a temporary period of psychosocial transition toward a resolution of the identity stage (there is some question regarding how temporary this status is, as we discuss below). Resolution of the identity stage, in turn, is represented by the fourth identity status, *Identity Achievement*. Identity Achievement is generally considered the most mature and functionally complex status, and it has been empirically associated with, among other things, balanced thinking (Boyes and Chandler, 1992), mature interpersonal relationships (Orlofsky *et al.*, 1973; Dyk and Adams, 1990), and give-and-take relationships with parents (Jackson *et al.*, 1990).

The above discussion represents the developmental logic widely believed to underlie the identity statuses. However, the postulation that the statuses constitute developmental *sub stages* of the identity stage has been questioned (Waterman, 1982; Côté and Levine, 1988; Stephen *et al.*, 1992; van Hoof, 1999; Schwartz, 2001). While there are obvious differences between Achievement and Diffusion in terms of psychosocial adequacy, and these are traceable to Erikson's original formulations regarding resolutions of the identity stage, other differences in psychosocial adequacy between and among the statuses are less clear (van Hoof, 2001). The ambiguities include what these statuses mean in terms of the *processes* involved in the formulation of adult identities, and in the *outcomes* of the identity stage that people use as a basis for functioning in adult communities (cf. Levine, 2001). The present study attempts to address some of these ambiguities.

Criticisms of the identity status approach include its narrowness (van Hoof, 1999) and lack of attention to broader social-contextual factors affecting identity development (Côté and Levine, 1988). Its referents, exploration and commitment, are primarily intrapsychic processes and, theoretically speaking, are not necessarily connected to the social circumstances in which the identity is formed (van Hoof, 2001). What has been called for in the social psychological literature is the integration of more contextually oriented elements into the psychological study of identity, to bring neo-Eriksonian identity theory closer to the multidimensionality and scope that Erikson envisioned (Côté and Levine, 1987, 2002; Schwartz, 2001).

Accomplishing this requires an examination of the sociological literature on identity and of the inherent parallels between psychological and sociological conceptions of identity (cf. Côté, 1993). Acknowledging and capitalizing on these parallels may provide a vehicle for formulating a more comprehensive, integrative perspective on identity. It is with this goal in mind that we now move to an account of the sociological view of identity development.

## A sociological approach: the individualization process

A perennial concern in sociology, dating back to its founders, concerns the general problem of social regulation and the *destructuring* of traditional forms of culture in the face of modernization. This long-standing concern has been given new life with recent work regarding the ascendance of the process of *individualization* associated with contemporary late modern society (sometimes referred to postmodernity). [Beck \(1992\)](#) views individualization as a function of cultural destructuring processes: as a society undergoes a reorganization, people are increasingly left to their own devices in making major life decisions, including finding communities with which to establish integrative bonds on their own. Individualization can thus be defined as the “the tendency towards increasingly flexible self-awareness as the individual must make decisions and choose identities from among an increasingly complex range of options” (Wallace, 1995, p. 13). Accordingly, an emerging normative course of maturation in late modern societies involves people developing themselves as self-determining “individuals,” increasingly without secure community bonds.

Before proceeding, it is important to clearly differentiate the sociological concept of individualization from the psychological concept of “individuation.” Individuation refers to the mental “separation–individuation process” that begins in early infancy when the boundary is established “between the ‘me’ and the ‘not-me’” (Levinson, 1996, p. 32). Usage of this term involves the processes by which offspring struggle to develop an emotional distance from their parents while gaining a sense of self in their own right, but it does not require absolute autonomy from those parents, nor does it require parents to withdraw support from their children. [Blos’ \(1967\)](#) concept of the “second individuation process of adolescence” takes this notion into the realm of identity formation, but he is still referring to a largely psychological struggle with parental introjects, rather than a social challenge with cultural imperatives. In contrast, “individualization” refers to the social processes by which people attempt to compensate for a lack of *collective* support from their community and culture, which may or may not implicate their parents.

The term “individualization” thus refers to the extent to which people are left by their culture to their own devices in terms of meeting their own survival needs, determining the directions their lives will take, and making myriad choices along the way, whereas individuation refers to the basic process of developing a sense of self. Accordingly, a certain amount of individuation is necessary for the person to individualize, but individuating does not lead to individualization if cultural conditions are not conducive to it (see [Côté and Levine, 2002](#), for further discussion of the individualization process in relation to identity formation).

In late modern societies there can be tremendous benefits associated with the individualization process, but there can also be significant pitfalls and liabilities. The source of these pitfalls lies in the fact that this “freedom” requires a great deal from people, placing pressures on them that they may not be personally equipped to handle adequately (cf.

[Baumeister and Muraven, 1996](#)). These pressures include the need to: continually reflect on relationships with others; constantly plan ahead; make life-altering choices; take responsibility for personal failings and limitations; and overcome any structural obstacles affecting them, such as barriers related to social class, race, gender, and age (cf. Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). In other words, fully benefitting from this freedom requires high levels of psychosocial functioning and an astute self-discipline in dealing with one's self and one's society, often in the absence of collective supports (for an extensive discussion of these problems as they relate to contemporary adulthood, see Kurtines *et al.*, 1995; [Côté, 2000](#)).

In undertaking this increasingly compulsory individualization process with varying capacities and preparation, people approach the life course in a range of ways. For example, at one extreme, people without the appropriate capacities and preparation can pursue a life course without exerting much mental effort by simply selecting a number of "default options" now available in the restructured consumer–corporate society and mass culture of late-modernity. A common default option involves forming and enhancing one's personal identity by focusing on the latest youth culture fashions and trends to impress peers, while ignoring self-improvement in areas such as higher-order competency refinement, human capital skill accumulation, and credential acquisition. Côté (2000) refers to this as "default individualization" because it involves a life course dictated by immediate circumstance and caprice, with little agentic assertion on the part of the person.

Alternatively, people who are better prepared for the challenges of individualization can capitalize on the destructuring associated with late-modern society by pursuing opportunities that lead to self-improvement in a variety of intellectual, occupational, and psychosocial areas, and by selecting life courses based on extensive exploration of available alternatives. Côté (2000) terms this "developmental individualization" because it involves an *agentic* life course of continual and deliberate growth (cf. [Evans and Heinz, 1994](#), distinction between active and passive individualization).

Having reviewed both the psychological and sociological approaches to identity, the task is to integrate the two viewpoints into a viable theoretical approach. Such an approach must respect both the intrapsychic tradition espoused by psychologists and the socio-contextual tradition embraced by sociologists. A theory fitting this description would connect the intrapersonal dimensions of identity (e.g. conscious exploration and a sense of commitment) with a macro-level view of identity development (e.g. individualization and community integration). Côté (1996) has formulated such a theory, which he has termed the identity capital model.

## **A developmental social psychological approach: the identity capital model**

The development of the identity capital model has been chronicled in previous volumes of this journal (Côté, 1996, 1997). It represents a developmental–social psychological approach to identity formation that integrates psychological and sociological understandings of identity. Sociologically, it is based on the assumption that, faced with global economic and political changes, late-modern institutional supports for making certain developmental transitions have become increasingly deficient, leaving many individuals largely on their own in terms of negotiating their life courses, particularly with regard to setting and achieving goals. Psychologically, it proposes that the resources at individuals' disposal become

important, particularly those psychological resources that can facilitate the movement through, and negotiation with, various social structures and developmental contexts. In this sense, certain internal resources are postulated to enable mastery of external structures. To cite a couple of examples, higher levels of ego strength help the person undertake more challenging tasks that can lead to greater future personal and economic benefits; and a greater sense of purpose in life facilitates long-term planning, increasing the likelihood of accomplishing higher-order personal and professional goals.

Identity capital resources vary in degree of tangibility: more tangible resources tend to be manifest in the *behaviours* and *possessions* of individuals, whereas more intangible resources tend to constitute *personality* attributes. Tangible attributes can include financial resources, educational credentials, fraternity/sorority and club/association memberships, and parental social status. Intangible resources can conceivably include capacities such as ego strength, an internal locus of control, self-monitoring, self-esteem, a sense of purpose in life, social perspective taking, critical thinking abilities, and moral reasoning abilities (Côté, 1997). The common feature of these attributes is that they can afford the person cognitive and behavioural capacities with which to understand and negotiate the various obstacles and opportunities commonly encountered throughout late-modern adult life (cf. Ferrer-Wreder *et al.*, 2002).

Empirical research validating this model has also been published in a previous volume of this journal (Côté, 1997). That article presented a means of measuring some of the intangible resources from among the potential attributes listed above. For example, the Multi-Measure Agentic Personality Scale (MAPS) was found to predict “identity capital acquisition” in terms of formulating a stronger sense of adult identity and a sense of acceptance in a stable adult community, as measured by the Identity Stage Resolution Index (ISRI). Specifically, Côté (1997) reported that the MAPS, comprising established measures of agency-related traits such as ego strength and purpose in life, correlates in the magnitude of 0.25 to 0.40 with the two ISRI scales, the Adult Identity Resolution Scale (AIRS) and the Community Identity Resolution Scale (CIRS).

## **Linking the identity status paradigm with the individualization thesis via the identity capital model**

With these brief reviews, we can now discuss potential links between identity status and individualization theory provided by the identity capital model. The primary link appears to be that the individualization process can be operationalized in terms of agency in identity formation (e.g. as measured by the MAPS), with identity status research having mapped out several dimensions of agency relevant to individualization theory: exploration appears to be an analogue of individualization, and commitment a counterpart of community integration (cf. Adams and Marshall, 1996).

Given the complementarity of community integration with commitment, and of individualization with exploration, a high degree of psychological commitment should be associated with more involvement in more structured, or normed, communities (high community integration, as measured by the ISRI), as defined by the Foreclosed and Achieved statuses. Conversely, a low degree of commitment should translate into a lack of involvement in a normed community, represented by the strategies of Diffusion and, to a lesser extent, Moratorium (low community integration). It thus follows that a committed

person would more likely to choose to live in a structured community supportive of his or her goals, values, and beliefs, and to maintain a connectedness, integration, or rootedness with others, while the uncommitted person would tend to be alienated, loosely rooted, or disconnected from others. Conversely, given the reciprocal nature of socialization processes, being socialized into one or the other types of communities should tend to nurture differing levels of commitment (i.e. normed communities tend to produce high commitment, while anomic communities tend to produce low levels of commitment).

Similarly, conscious exploration can be seen as the psychological equivalent of the sociological dimension of individualization. A high degree of self-exploration should be associated with a high degree of self-direction in determining one's life course (high agency). Conversely, a low degree of self-exploration may translate into a low level of control over one's life course (low agency), such that personal and social identities remain undifferentiated and undeveloped beyond default options available to the person ([Levine, 2001](#)). This description is likely to characterize individuals who exert comparatively little effort in the identity formation process, particularly Identity Diffusions, and to a lesser extent Identity Foreclosures (those in the latter identity status likely engage in more "identity work" in implementing their commitments, but both statuses expend little effort in exploration).

Taken together, these dimensions roughly correlate with Erikson's (e.g. 1968) bipolar construct "ego identity versus identity confusion" associated with the experience of the identity stage: the combination of undifferentiated and anomic positions is analogous to identity confusion, and the combination of (agentic) individualized and nomic outcomes is comparable to a functionally successful resolution of the identity stage (cf. [Adams and Marshall, 1996](#); [Schwartz, 2001](#)). The other two combinations, anomic with individualized and nomic with undifferentiated, may represent variants on Erikson's bipolar construct of identity stage resolution; within the identity status model, the Foreclosed status should correspond with the combination of nomic and undifferentiated orientations, and the Moratorium status to the combination of anomic and individualized orientations. However, given the ambiguous developmental logic of the identity status paradigm and the unclear relationships of the Foreclosure and Moratorium statuses to Erikson's theory (cf. [Côté and Levine, 1987](#)), these predictions are more tenuous. With respect to the Moratorium status, it is unclear just how much developmental individualization can take place under anomic conditions, given that agency is operationalized in terms of constructs like purpose in life.

## Hypotheses

Given the above-noted parallels among identity status, developmental individualization, and identity capital, it seems appropriate to hypothesize that: (1) Identity Achievement represents the combination of higher levels of agency and community integration associated with developmental individualization (i.e. positive correlations with the MAPS, AIRS, and CIRS); (2) Identity Moratorium is typified by agency without community integration (i.e. a positive correlation with the MAPS and negative correlations with the AIRS, and CIRS); (3) Identity Foreclosure is characterized by community integration without agency (i.e. a negative correlation with the MAPS and positive correlations with the AIRS, and CIRS); and (4) Identity Diffusion represents the relative absence of both agency and community integration related to default individualization (i.e. negative correlations with the MAPS, AIRS, and CIRS).

## METHOD

### Study 1

*Participants.* Participants were drawn from a variety of first-year classes across a large university campus in Canada. Two hundred seventy-six first-year students came to sessions in which they completed the measures used here (along with others). Of those participants, 43.1% were male and 56.9% were female. Their average age was 19.2 years (S.D. = 1.6; range = 17–31, with 90% between 18 and 20 years). Ethnic composition of this university in the early 1990s, when the data were collected, was predominantly White (81%), with the remaining groups representing East Asians (7.5%), South Asians (4%), Black (2%), and “other” (5.5%). These participants constitute the first panel from the longitudinal sample reported in Côté (1997).

*Measures.* Details concerning the validity and reliability of the MAPS and ISRI can be found in a previous volume of this journal (Côté, 1997). Some data from the original 1997 study are used here for analyses in Study 1, but results concerning identity status are reported here for the first time. Studies 2 and 3 are reported as replications of findings from that original sample.

*The Multimeasure Agentic Personality Scale (MAPS).* Côté (1997) reported that a variety of established personality scales were initially analysed to determine their suitability as operationalizations of intangible identity capital resources. Of these, six were determined through factor analytic procedures to represent a unidimensional scale of sufficient reliability (i.e. all scales loaded higher than 0.40 on one dimension). To ensure an equal weighting of each scale in the final score,  $z$ -scores for each individual scale were calculated before computing a general standardized scale to represent the agentic personality factor.

The unifactorial MAPS comprises the sum of the following scale total scores (effectively treating each scale as a single variable): (a) the 25-item Self-Esteem Inventory (Adult Form; Coopersmith, 1981); (b) the 12-item Purpose-in-Life Test; Crumbaugh and Maholick, 1969); (c) the Self Actualization Scale (6, six-point items taken from The Personal Orientation Inventory—Shostrom, 1963); (d) “internal locus of control” (from Rotter’s, 1966, locus of control scale, with five items tapping internal locus of control converted to six-point Likert-type items); (e) The Ego Strength Scale (26 five-point items taken from Epstein, 1983); and (f) “ideological commitment” (eight items representing Identity Achievement in the ideology domain taken from the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status [EOM-EIS-II; Adams *et al.*, 1989]). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient based on the total scores of the six scales for the present sample was 0.67. For the analyses reported below, the ideological commitment scale was removed from the MAPS because those items were taken from the measure of identity status described below. Hence, the “five-item” scale is referred to here as the MAPSr (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.61).

*Identity Stage Resolution Index (ISRI).* As Côté (1997) reported, the ISRI was developed to approximate forms of identity capital accumulation during late adolescence representing progress made in resolving the identity stage while establishing membership in an adult community. The total scale consists of seven items. Each item is measured on a five-point scale ranging from *not at all true* to *entirely true*. Factor analysis of the ISRI revealed two factors, with three items tapping the sense of being an adult (AIRS), and four items reflecting a sense community-identity integration (CIRS).



Respondents were asked to assess each ISRI item in terms of the extent to which each was true about their own lives. The items constituting the AIRS enquire about the extent to which respondents: (a) consider themselves to be an adult; (b) feel that they have matured fully; and (c) feel respected by others as an adult. The items constituting the CIRS tap the extent to which participants: (a) have found their niche in life; (b) know where they stand on world issues (political and economic); (c) have settled on a lifestyle that they are satisfied with for the rest of their lives; and (d) have found a community in which to live for the remainder of their lives. For this sample, the AIRS had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.77, while the CIRS had an alpha of 0.64.

*Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status II (EOM-EIS-II)*. The Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status II (EOM-EIS-II; [Bennion and Adams, 1986](#)) assesses ego identity status in four ideological content areas (politics, religion, occupation, and philosophical lifestyle) and in four interpersonal content areas (friendships, dating, gender roles, and recreation). The EOM-EIS-II contains 64 items, 16 measuring each status. Of the 16 items targeting each identity status, two assess each content area. The EOM-EIS-II generates continuous scores for each status both in overall terms and within the ideological and interpersonal content area clusters. For this sample, alphas for the overall scales were 0.75 for Achievement, 0.71 for Moratorium, 0.85 for Foreclosure, and 0.61 for Diffusion.

## Study 2

*Participants.* A cross-sectional sample of students at a large American university was gathered for Study 2. Instruments were administered to students in classroom and laboratory settings, with students receiving course credit for their participation. The sample comprised 501 students (118 males, 365 females, 18 not reporting gender), with an average age of 21.7 years (*s.d.* = 5.1; range = 17–53, with 86% between 18 and 24 years). With regard to the ethnic distribution of the sample, there were 86 non-Hispanic Whites, 46 non-Hispanic Blacks, 298 Hispanics, and 71 Others.

*Measures.* The MAPS and EOM-EIS-II were administered in the same form as in Study 1. Cronbach's alphas for the EOM-EIS-II in Study 2 were: Diffusion 0.70; Foreclosure 0.87; Moratorium 0.77; Achievement 0.77. The alpha coefficient for the Multi-measure Agentic Personality Scale revised (MAPSr) was 0.70.

## Study 3

*Participants.* An additional cross-sectional sample of American university students was tested in classroom and laboratory settings, with students receiving course credit for their participation. The sample consisted of 114 students (16 males, 98 females). The average age of the sample was 22.8 years (*s.d.* = 5.3; range = 17–53, with 81% between 17 and 25 years). The ethnic distribution of the sample was: 19 non-Hispanic Whites, 14 non-Hispanic Blacks, 75 Hispanics, and six others.

The MAPS, ISRI, and EOM-EIS-II were administered in the same form as in Study 1. Cronbach's alphas for the EOM-EIS-II were: Diffusion 0.63, Foreclosure 0.84, Moratorium 0.74, and Achievement 0.72. Alpha coefficients for the MAPSr, AIRS, and CIRS were 0.67, 0.70, and 0.67, respectively.

## RESULTS

The hypotheses were tested by treating the identity statuses as the dependent variable in a series of analyses. The interval scores from the EOM-EIS-II, where each participant is assigned a score for each identity status, provided the basis for correlational and regression analyses. In these analyses, identity statuses are treated as “traits,” which all participants share in varying degrees.

Table 1 displays the correlations among the EOM-EIS-II, MAPS<sub>r</sub>, AIRS, and CIRS from all three studies. As expected, because a portion of this scale factored with the other MAPS scales in the original study (Côté, 1997), higher scores on the Identity Achievement scale are clearly and consistently associated with more agentic personality tendencies as measured by the MAPS<sub>r</sub>. This applies for the total score and both sets of domains (ideological and interpersonal). As predicted, though, Identity Achievement is also consistently and positively associated with both the CIRS — suggesting a greater community integration as proposed by the individualization model — and the AIRS, suggesting higher levels of developmental maturity. Thus, these results supported the hypothesis that Identity Achievement represents the combination of agency and community integration, and hence a form of developmental individualization.

With respect to the Identity Moratorium scale, however, the negative correlations of this scale with the MAPS<sub>r</sub> disqualify the Moratorium status as representative of developmental individualization. In effect, the more a person is actively exploring ideological and

**Table 1.** Identity capital and identity status: correlations of the ISRI subscales and the MAPS<sub>r</sub> with identity status scales (EOM-EIS-II) for the overall sample

| Identity status scale       | MAPS <sub>r</sub> |          |          | CIRS     |         | AIRS    |         |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
|                             | Study 1           | Study 2  | Study 3  | Study 1  | Study 3 | Study 1 | Study 3 |
| <i>Total domains</i>        |                   |          |          |          |         |         |         |
| Achievement                 | 0.40***           | 0.48***  | 0.40***  | 0.42***  | 0.30*** | 0.31*** | 0.31*** |
| Moratorium                  | -0.39***          | -0.37*** | -0.34*** | -0.31*** | -0.12   | -0.09   | -0.21*  |
| Foreclosure                 | 0.08              | -0.27**  | -0.17    | 0.12     | 0.12    | 0.05    | -0.11   |
| Diffusion                   | -0.25***          | -0.42*** | -0.34*** | -0.19**  | -0.29** | -0.08   | -0.09   |
| <i>Ideological Domain</i>   |                   |          |          |          |         |         |         |
| Achievement                 | 0.38***           | 0.42***  | 0.32**   | 0.41***  | 0.22*   | 0.25*** | 0.32**  |
| Moratorium                  | -0.43***          | -0.40*** | -0.28**  | -0.37*** | -0.19*  | -0.13*  | -0.18   |
| Foreclosure                 | 0.01              | -0.26*** | -0.25**  | 0.12     | -0.01   | 0.00    | -0.14   |
| Diffusion                   | -0.25***          | -0.35*** | -0.24*   | -0.25*** | -0.21*  | -0.06   | -0.02   |
| <i>Interpersonal Domain</i> |                   |          |          |          |         |         |         |
| Achievement                 | 0.32***           | 0.43***  | 0.39***  | 0.34***  | 0.30**  | 0.29**  | 0.28**  |
| Moratorium                  | -0.18**           | -0.23*** | -0.31**  | -0.14*   | -0.20*  | 0.01    | -0.02   |
| Foreclosure                 | 0.10              | -0.23*** | -0.07    | 0.10     | 0.24**  | 0.07    | -0.06   |
| Diffusion                   | -0.15*            | -0.37*** | -0.30*** | -0.04    | -0.26** | -0.07   | -0.14   |

Study 1:  $n_s = 220$ – $258$  first year students.

Study 2:  $n = 502$  1–4th year undergraduates.

Study 3:  $n = 114$  1–4th year undergraduates.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

interpersonal alternatives, the lower his/her senses of self-esteem, purpose, self-actualization, and the like. This suggests that default individualization responses are associated with the Moratorium status. However, the negative correlations with the ISRI scales were as predicted, suggesting that the Moratorium person tends to function in a relatively anomic environment characterized by a lower level of community integration.

The non-significant associations between the Identity Foreclosure scale and the MAPS<sub>r</sub> (with the exception of study 2, where the coefficient reached significance) and the ISRI do not help clarify the relationship of the Foreclosure status to the individualization process. The results do support the prediction that Foreclosure tendencies are not associated with higher levels of agency, but contrary to predictions, there is no significant positive association between Foreclosure and community integration. These findings suggest that the Foreclosure status may be independent of the individualization process altogether, but further study is warranted.

Finally, similar to the predictions for Identity Achievement, predictions for Identity Diffusion were strongly supported, as evidenced by negative correlations with the MAPS<sub>r</sub> and ISRI, replicated across the three studies.

Regression analyses generally support the above correlational results (see Tables 2 and 3; the pattern of correlations generally held when males and females were analysed separately, so controls for gender were not necessary.) The same regression procedure was repeated with each identity status interval score treated as a dependent variable, with the MAPS entered first, followed by the CIRS, and then the AIRS as independent variables. This provides a consistent format for each analysis, and is based on the finding (Côté, 1997) that the MAPS

**Table 2** Predicting identity status scores with identity capital variables: Hierarchical regression summary tables from study 1

| Independent variables   | $\beta$ | $R^2$ | Unique (part $r^2$ ) | $t$ -Value |
|---|---------|-------|----------------------|------------|
| <i>Dependent variable: Identity Achievement Scale (n = 220)</i> |         |       |                      |            |
| MAPS <sub>r</sub>   | 0.26    | 0.15  | 0.06                 | 4.1***     |
| CIRS  | 0.28    | 0.19  | 0.06                 | 4.0***     |
| AIRS  | 0.10    | 0.20  | 0.01                 | 1.5        |
| <i>Dependent variable: Identity Moratorium Scale (n = 216)</i>  |         |       |                      |            |
| MAPS <sub>r</sub>   | -0.33   | 0.15  | 0.09                 | -4.8***    |
| CIRS  | -0.24   | 0.17  | 0.04                 | -3.3***    |
| AIRS  | 0.16    | 0.19  | 0.02                 | 2.2*       |
| <i>Dependent Variable: Identity Foreclosure Scale (n = 212)</i> |         |       |                      |            |
| MAPS <sub>r</sub>   | 0.03    | 0.00  | 0.02                 | 0.4        |
| CIRS  | 0.1     | 0.01  | 0.01                 | 1.2        |
| AIRS  | 0.0     | 0.01  | 0.01                 | -0.02      |
| <i>Dependent Variable: Identity Diffusion Scale (n = 217)</i>   |         |       |                      |            |
| MAPS <sub>r</sub>   | -0.59   | 0.07  | 0.04                 | -3.3***    |
| CIRS  | -0.39   | 0.08  | 0.02                 | -1.9*      |
| AIRS  | 0.27    | 0.09  | 0.01                 | 1.1        |

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

**Table 3** Predicting identity status scores with identity capital variables: Hierarchical regression summary tables from study 3

| Independent variables  | $\beta$ | $R^2$ | Unique $R^2$<br>(part $r^2$ ) | t-Value |
|--|---------|-------|-------------------------------|---------|
| <i>Dependent variable: Interval Identity Achievement Scale (n = 114)</i> |         |       |                               |         |
| MAPSr  | 0.40    | 0.15  | 0.11                          | 4.4***  |
| CIRS   | 0.21    | 0.19  | 0.02                          | 2.3*    |
| AIRS   | 0.15    | 0.20  | 0.01                          | 1.5     |
| <i>Dependent variable: Interval Identity Moratorium Scale (n = 114)</i>  |         |       |                               |         |
| MAPSr  | -0.34   | 0.11  | 0.05                          | -3.7*** |
| CIRS   | -0.07   | 0.11  | 0.00                          | -0.7    |
| AIRS   | -0.12   | 0.11  | 0.01                          | -1.2    |
| <i>Dependent variable: Interval Identity Foreclosure Scale (n = 114)</i> |         |       |                               |         |
| MAPSr  | -0.18   | 0.02  | 0.04                          | -1.8    |
| CIRS   | 0.15    | 0.04  | 0.03                          | 1.5     |
| AIRS   | -0.15   | 0.05  | 0.01                          | -1.4    |
| <i>Dependent variable: Interval Identity Diffusion Scale (n = 114)</i>   |         |       |                               |         |
| MAPSr  | -0.34   | 0.11  | 0.08                          | -3.7*** |
| CIRS   | -0.29   | 0.18  | 0.08                          | -3.3**  |
| AIRS   | 0.06    | 0.18  | 0.01                          | 0.6     |

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

represents deep-seated personality characteristics that are relatively resistant to change among university students, while the CIRS and AIRS are more conducive to change in a sample of this nature; in fact, the latter represent major developmental tasks for university students.

For the Study 1 sample, with all three variables entered, Identity Achievement emerged as significantly and simultaneously associated with both agency (MAPS) and community integration (CIRS), but not with adult identity (AIRS). Identity Moratorium was simultaneously associated with all three identity capital variables, but with the MAPS and CIRS entered, the AIRS became positively associated with Identity Moratorium. This last finding is difficult to interpret, but given its small unique effect and the fact that it was not replicated in Study 3, we interpret it as a statistical artefact. Identity Foreclosure scores show no relationship with the identity capital variables, while Identity Diffusion evidences the negative relationship pattern obtained in the correlational analyses. When these same procedures were repeated with Study 3 data (Table 3), the results from Study 1 were almost perfectly replicated. The exception to this was in the Identity Moratorium analysis, where only the MAPSr was a significant predictor.

Notable from the regression analyses is the fact that the CIRS is significantly associated with three of the four identity status scales, whereas the AIRS is associated in only one instance. This differential pattern suggests that community integration differentiates among identity statuses to a greater extent than does adult identity formation, at least among those in the age ranges studied here.

## DISCUSSION

The analyses undertaken in the above three studies help us to better understand the relationships among concepts employed in psychological and sociological approaches to identity. Noteworthy in the results is the high degree of replication of findings among samples with different ethnic compositions from two different countries.

Two of the four hypotheses were strongly supported: Identity Achievement (hypothesis 1) and Identity Diffusion (hypothesis 4) both emerged as predicted in terms of the identity capital measures. However, the other two hypotheses (regarding Moratorium and Foreclosure) received mixed support. The results regarding Identity Achievement and Identity Diffusion closely fit both the sociological and psychological hypotheses. Sociologically, Achievement appears to represent a form of developmental individualization, while Diffusion typifies a form of default individualization. Psychologically, the opposing nature of these statuses, as per agency and community integration, conforms to Erikson's original notions of ego identity *vs.* identity confusion. The mixed results for Moratorium and Foreclosure may be associated with ambiguity in the developmental logic of identity status theory, which makes it difficult to assess the respective roles of Moratorium and Foreclosure in a possible progression toward Identity Achievement.

With respect to the first mixed result (hypothesis 2), the low level of agency for Moratorium, represented by the negative correlations, was opposite to that predicted, although the low level of community integration was as predicted. The negative correlation with agency raises questions about the developmental adequacy of Moratorium (as measured by the EOM-EIS-II) as a response to the identity stage. Reliable evidence regarding the developmental adequacy of Moratorium is especially important because this status is ostensibly a precursor of Identity Achievement. Given that the MAPS<sub>r</sub> embodies relatively stable personality characteristics, it is difficult to understand how respondents who score high on Moratorium—especially those with very low MAPS<sub>r</sub> scores—could undergo significant personality changes in self-esteem, purpose in life, locus of control, and the like during a transition to an Achieved status in adulthood. For example, the (closely replicated) correlations of the MAPS<sub>r</sub> with Achievement range from 0.31 to 0.48, while the same correlation with Moratorium is significant in the opposite direction (ranging from -0.21 to -0.39—differences in the magnitude of 0.52 to 0.87). Indeed, these findings suggest that Identity Moratorium is indistinguishable from Identity Diffusion on this key variable, calling into question the designation of Moratorium as a “higher” status. This pattern of findings may, however, help to explain the anxiety and uncertainty that has been empirically associated with the Moratorium status (e.g. [Kidwell et al., 1995](#)). The findings also suggest that the transition from Moratorium to Achievement may require a massive personality reconfiguration that may or may not be successfully negotiated.

The second mixed result involved hypothesis 3, which predicted that Identity Foreclosure would be associated with higher levels of community integration and lower levels of agency. Indeed, the correlational results suggest a weak negative relationship between Foreclosure and agency. However, the community integration measure shows a generally non-significant relationship with Foreclosure. Unlike the results for Moratorium, however, this finding is not inconsistent with the developmental logic of the identity status paradigm, given that identification with parents (or other significant others) may not require integration into a wider community in late modern society, especially if the parents are not highly integrated themselves.

Taken together, the results indicate that our suggested integration of the identity status paradigm and the individualization thesis requires some revision, at least in relation to the variables employed here. Some degree of caution seems necessary with regard to our conceptualization of the relationship between the dimensions underpinning the identity statuses (commitment and exploration) with community integration and agency. For the sake of simplicity, we suggested that the dimensions of agency and community integration can be treated as conceptually orthogonal, when in fact the empirical associations between the MAPS<sub>r</sub> and the CIRS actually range from 0.25 to 0.40 (as reported in the Introduction and in Côté, 1997). Indeed, a scatterplot representing this correlation shows that most cases distribute along a diagonal corresponding to a diffusion-achievement dimension, with fewer distributing in areas that might be represented by an orthogonal Foreclosure-Moratorium dimension. It seems, then, that identity capital resources, like Erikson's bipolar dimension, capture default and developmental individualization, but orthogonal outcomes (i.e. Foreclosure and Moratorium) do not fit the model.

### *Suggestions for future research*

Although this paper helps us address several questions, it leaves several others unanswered regarding Foreclosure and Moratorium. Future research will need to address issues related to these two statuses.

Foreclosure emerges as being largely unrelated to the individualization process and identity capital acquisition. Indeed, from the point of view of individualization theory (rather than from within the identity status paradigm), Foreclosure represents the absence of individualization, where the person is undifferentiated from the collective. In conjunction with the non-significant to low-negative correlations with agency, our findings suggest some sort of developmental arrest. Indeed, Foreclosure has been postulated to be a throwback to premodern forms of social organization where identity development is severely circumscribed (Côté, 1996, 2000).

The results for Moratorium are most surprising in terms of the basic premise of the identity status paradigm. Contrary to this premise, the findings from all three studies suggest that Moratorium has more in common with Diffusion than with Achievement in terms of agency and community integration. Accordingly, both Moratorium and Diffusion, coupled with low MAPS<sub>r</sub> scores, may also constitute forms of arrested development, blocking the person from acquiring the (agentic) means to integrate into adult communities. If this is the case, the Moratorium to Achievement identity transition may be more difficult to navigate and may occur somewhat less frequently than previously thought. If this is the case, the developmental logic inherent in the identity status model needs to be reconsidered, and the potential "crises" preceding resolution of the identity stage re-examined. As Côté and Levine (1988) pointed out some time ago, Erikson's definition of the "identity moratorium" is a social-psychological one, not the psychological one associated with the identity status paradigm (i.e. for Erikson, all young people attending college are in a "moratorium" by definition).

One explanation for this surprising finding involves socio-contextual changes mapped out by Côté (1996, 2000), whereby both Diffusion and Moratorium are becoming more "functionally adaptive" in a world where securing forms of community integration is becoming increasingly difficult. Although work from several decades ago by [Waterman and Waterman \(1971\)](#) found that about three quarters of Moratoriums eventually matured into the Achievement status, it is possible that in the intervening decades a heightening of

late-modernity has affected the identity formation (exploration) processes as studied by identity status researchers (this difference may also be due to different instruments — Waterman and Waterman used the original interview format with categorical assignments, whereas we used a paper-and-pencil measure using interval scores). If so, the period of exploration without making community-integrating commitments (Moratorium) may be more “characterological,” or a permanent personality feature for a greater proportion of the population (cf. Josselson, 1996; [Marcia, 1980](#)).

This explanation accords with sociological theorizing about late modernity (or postmodernity; cf. Gergen’s, 1991, “pastiche personality”). Late-modern normative pressures seem to be pushing people to engage in more management of their social identities, more projection of situationally appropriate images, and a greater need for flexibility so as not to diminish future options (Côté, 1996). Young people affected by these pressures can go to great lengths to be “non-judgmental” and avoid closure on the gamut of identity issues they feel are thrust upon them (occupation, values, beliefs, and so forth). While this stance of “relativistic commitment suspension” may gain acceptance in “postmodern youth cultures” (e.g. du [Bois-Reymond, 1998](#); Epstein, 1998), it may be taken at the expense of building the personality strengths associated with the MAPS and ISRI.

Research investigating this emergent phenomenon should provide useful information about contextual factors affecting identity formation. For example, given the apparent similarity between Moratorium and Diffusion, and the probability that it is becoming increasingly difficult to anchor a stable identity in a stable community, possible vacillations between Moratorium and Diffusion should be investigated (see [Côté and Levine, 2002](#)). These would constitute MD-MD cycles, similar to the MAMA cycles already posited to occur (e.g. [Stephen et al., 1992](#)).

At the same time, we need to gain a better understanding of what Moratoriums are experiencing in their explorations, and what proportion of Moratoriums actually move on to Achievement. Possibly, a sub-typing of the Moratorium status, as Archer and Waterman (1990) have done with Diffusion and Foreclosure, is in order. This line of inquiry will re-open the issue of what constitutes the identity crisis, and it should lead researchers to explore identity-related problems associated with identity formation and maintenance in late-modern societies (e.g. Côté, 2000). It also invites those favouring a postmodernist approach to identity to investigate the developmental implications of their position, given that the postmodernist approach can be antithetical to the developmental approach (e.g. Rattansi and Phoenix, 1997).

This direct incorporation of psychological concerns (identity status transitions) with sociological frameworks (identity problems associated with individualization in late-modernity) should advance the field of identity research by increasing its disciplinary range, thereby making it more understandable and useful to social scientists, policy-makers, and the public.

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