


# 6 The Self



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 6.1 Summarize the differences among cultures in conceptions of the self.
- 6.2 Describe the different kinds of selves adolescents may have, and explain how this variation reflects adolescents' cognitive development.
- 6.3 Explain how and why self-esteem changes from pre-adolescence through adolescence, including ethnic variations.
- 6.4 List Harter's 8 domains of self-esteem, and identify which of them has the most influence on global self-esteem in adolescence.
- 6.5 Describe how self-esteem changes from adolescence through emerging adulthood, and why.
- 6.6 Summarize the evidence for emotional volatility in adolescence.
- 6.7 Evaluate the claim that girls lose their "voice" in adolescence.
- 6.8 Connect Erikson's theory of identity development to the identity status model on which most research is based.
- 6.9 Evaluate Erikson's theory from the perspective of postmodern theory, and note the theory's limitations concerning gender and culture.
- 6.10 Describe Phinney's model of ethnic identity in adolescence.
- 6.11 Explain how globalization is influencing identity development in adolescence and emerging adulthood.
- 6.12 Summarize adolescents' emotional states during times they are alone.



*The Catcher in the Rye*, by J. D. Salinger (1951/1964), is probably the best-known novel of adolescence. It consists entirely of one long, self-reflective monologue by the main character, Holden Caulfield. Holden is talking to someone, but we never learn who the person is—a psychologist, perhaps? He gives a long narrative about a dramatic 24-hour period of his life. It begins when he abruptly leaves the prep school where he had been enrolled, feeling alienated from his schoolmates, sick to death at what he perceives as their hypocrisy and shallowness. Afraid to go home—this is not the first time he has had trouble at school—he goes into New York City instead, where he has a series of misadventures, culminating in a physical and psychological collapse.

Holden tells the whole complicated (and often hilarious) story to the reader through the course of the book. However, it is not really the events that are the focus of Holden's tale but Holden himself. It is about his attempts to understand who he is and how he fits into the world around him, a world he finds confusing, bruising, and sad. He is reluctant to move toward entering the adult world, because nearly all adults seem to him to be pathetic or corrupt. He much prefers the world of children. Throughout the book he expresses his tender and perhaps romanticized view of their innocence and sweetness. His growing self-awareness has come as an unpleasant shock, because in his view it has jarred him out of the Eden of his childhood innocence.

**HOLDEN IS NOT A TYPICAL ADOLESCENT. IT IS** his atypical sensitivity and wit that make him such a compelling character in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Nevertheless, he provides a good example of how issues of the self come to the forefront of development in adolescence. He engages in self-reflection about his maturity, or lack of it (“I act quite young for my age . . .”). He evaluates himself, sometimes negatively (“I’m a terrific liar . . .”). He has moments of elation, but more moments of loneliness and sadness, in which he broods about death and the cruelties of life. He tries to work out issues of identity, of who he is and what he wants out of life, concluding—at least for now—that the only future that appeals to him is the imaginary one of being the “catcher in the rye,” the guardian of playing children.

The issues Holden confronts in his monologue are the kinds of issues we will address in this chapter on the self. As we saw in Chapter 3 on cognitive development, moving into adolescence results in new capacities for self-reflection. Adolescents can think about themselves in a way that younger children cannot. The ability for abstract thinking that develops in adolescence includes asking abstract questions about one's self, such as “What kind of person am I? What characteristics make me who I am? What am I good at, and not-so-good at? How do other people perceive me? What kind of life am I likely to have in the future?” Younger children can ask these questions, too, but only in

a rudimentary way. With adolescents' growing cognitive capacities, they can now ask these questions of themselves more clearly, and they can come up with answers that are more complex and insightful.

This enhanced cognitive capacity for self-reflection has a variety of consequences. It means that adolescents change in their *self-conceptions*, that is, in their answers to the question “What kind of person am I?” It means that adolescents change in their *self-esteem*, that is, in their capacity for evaluating their fundamental worth as a person. It means that adolescents change in their *emotional understanding*, as they become more aware of their own emotions and as their enhanced understanding of themselves and others affects their daily emotional lives. It also means that adolescents change in their *identities*, that is, in their perceptions of their capacities and characteristics and how these fit into the opportunities available to them in their society. All of these changes continue through emerging adulthood, but identity issues are especially central to emerging adulthood, even more than in adolescence in many respects.

We will discuss each of these aspects of the self in this chapter, and end with a look at young people's experiences and states of mind when they are alone. First, however, we consider the cultural approach to concepts of the self. Although self-reflection increases in adolescence as a part of normal cognitive development, the culture young people live in has profound effects on how they experience this change.

“All of us, at some moment, have had a vision of our existence as something unique, untransferable, and very precious. This revelation almost always takes place during adolescence. Self-discovery is above all the realization that we are alone: it is the opening of an impalpable, transparent wall—that of our consciousness—between the world and ourselves. It is true that we sense our aloneness almost as soon as we are born, but children and adults can transcend their solitude and forget themselves in games or work. The adolescent, however, vacillates between infancy and youth, halting for a moment before the infinite richness of the world. He is astonished at the fact of his being, and this astonishment leads to reflection: as he leans over the river of his consciousness, he asks himself if the face that appears there, disfigured by the water, is his own. The singularity of his being, which is pure sensation in children, becomes a problem and a question.”

—Octavio Paz (1985, p. 9)

## Culture and the Self

### 6.1 Summarize the differences among cultures in conceptions of the self.

The general distinction introduced in Chapter 4, between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, and between broad and narrow socialization values, comes into play in considerations of the self, and perhaps especially on this topic. As noted in Chapter 4, in discussing cultural differences in conceptions of the self, scholars typically distinguish between the *independent self* promoted by individualistic cultures and the *interdependent self* promoted by collectivistic cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Raeff, 2010; Shweder et al., 2006).

Cultures that promote an independent, individualistic self also promote and encourage reflection about the self. In such cultures it is seen as a good thing to think about yourself, to consider who you are as an independent person, and to think highly of yourself (within certain limits, of course—no culture values selfishness or egocentrism). Americans are especially known for their individualism and their focus on self-oriented issues. It was an American who first invented the term *self-esteem* (William James, in the late 19th century), and the United States continues to be known to the rest of the world as a place where the independent self is valued and promoted (Raeff, 2010).

However, not all cultures look at the self in this way or value the self to the same extent. In collectivistic cultures, characterized by narrow socialization, an interdependent conception of the self prevails. In these cultures, the interests of the group—the family, the kinship group, the ethnic group, the nation, the religious institution—are supposed to come first, before the needs of the individual. This means that it is not necessarily a good thing, in these cultures, to think highly of yourself. People who think highly of themselves, who possess a high level of self-esteem, threaten the harmony of the group because they may be inclined to pursue their personal interests regardless of the interests of the groups to which they belong.

Thus, children and adolescents in these cultures are socialized to mute their self-esteem and to learn to consider the interests and needs of others to be at least as important as the interests and needs of themselves (Lalonde & Chandler, 2004; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). By adolescence, this means that the “self” is thought of not so much as a separate, independent being, essentially apart from others, but as *defined by* relationships with others, to a large extent (Raeff, 2006). This is what it means for the self to be interdependent rather than independent. In the perspective of these cultures, the self cannot be understood apart from social roles and obligations.

We will learn in more detail about different ways of thinking about the self as we move along in this chapter. Throughout the chapter, keep in mind that cultures vary in the way their members are socialized to think about the self.

### thinking critically

Based on what you have learned so far in this book, what would you say are the economic reasons traditional cultures would promote an interdependent self?

## WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

1. In what way is the self conceptualized in collectivistic cultures?

## Self-Conceptions

- 6.2 Describe the different kinds of selves adolescents may have, and explain how this variation reflects adolescents' cognitive development.

Adolescents think about themselves differently than younger children do, in a variety of respects. The changes in self-understanding that occur in adolescence have their foundation in the more general changes in cognitive functioning discussed in Chapter 3. Specifically, adolescent self-conceptions, like adolescent cognitive development overall, become more *abstract* and more *complex*.

**actual self** A person's perception of the self as it is, contrasted with the possible self.

**possible selves** A person's conception of the self as it potentially may be. May include both an ideal self and a feared self.

**ideal self** The person an adolescent would like to be.

**feared self** The self a person imagines it is possible to become but dreads becoming.

## More Abstract

The hardest thing is coming to grips with who you are, accepting the fact that you're not perfect—but then doing things anyway. Even if you are really good at something or a really fine person, you also know that there's so much you aren't. You always know all the things you don't know and all the things you can't do. And however much you can fool the rest of the world, you always know how much bullshit a lot of it is.

—Nan, age 17 (in Bell, 1998, p. 78)

According to Susan Harter (1999, 2006a, 2006b), a scholar who has done extensive work on the development of self-conceptions from childhood through adolescence, with increasing age children describe themselves less in concrete terms (“I have a dog named Buster and a sister named Carrie”) and more in terms of their traits (“I'm pretty smart, but I'm kind of shy”). For adolescents, self-conceptions become still more trait-focused, and the traits become more abstract, as they describe themselves in terms of intangible personality characteristics. For example, one 15-year-old girl in a study on self-conceptions described herself as follows:

What am I like as a person? Complicated! I'm sensitive, friendly, outgoing, popular, and tolerant, though I can also be shy, self-conscious, even obnoxious. . . . I'm a pretty cheerful person, especially with my friends. . . . At home I'm more likely to be anxious around my parents. (Harter, 1990b, p. 352)

Notice the use of all the abstractions. “Sensitive.” “Outgoing.” “Cheerful.” “Anxious.” Adolescents' capacity for abstraction makes these kinds of descriptions possible.

One aspect of this capacity for abstraction in adolescents' self-conceptions is that they can distinguish between an **actual self** and **possible selves** (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). Scholars distinguish two kinds of possible selves, an ideal self and a feared self (Chalk et al., 2005). The **ideal self** is the person the adolescent would like to be (for example, an adolescent may have an ideal of becoming highly popular with peers or highly successful in athletics or music). The **feared self** is the person the adolescent imagines it is possible to become but dreads becoming (for example, an adolescent might fear becoming an alcoholic, or fear becoming like a disgraced relative or friend). Both kinds of possible selves require adolescents to think abstractly. That is, possible selves exist only as abstractions, as *ideas* in the adolescent's mind.

 **Watch the video**  
Explore the concept  
of Multiple Selves on  
**MyDevelopmentLab**

The capacity for thinking about an actual, an ideal, and a feared self is a cognitive achievement, but this capacity may be troubling in some respects. If you can imagine an ideal self, you can also become aware of the discrepancy between your actual self and your ideal self, between what you are and what you wish you were. If the discrepancy is large enough, it can result in feelings of failure, inadequacy, and depression. Studies have found that the size of the discrepancy between the actual and ideal self is related to depressed mood in both adolescents and emerging

adults (Papadakis et al., 2006). Furthermore, the discrepancy between the actual and the ideal self is greater in midadolescence than in either early or late adolescence (Strachen & Jones, 1982). This helps explain why depression is very rare before adolescence, but rates of depressed mood rise in early adolescence and peak in midadolescence (Costello et al., 2008; Petersen et al., 1993).

However, awareness of actual and possible selves provides some adolescents with a motivation to strive toward their ideal self and avoid becoming the feared self (Cota-Robles, Neiss, & Hunt, 2000; Oyserman & James, 2009). One study of an intervention designed to encourage adolescents to develop an academic possible self found that among the adolescents in the intervention, academic initiative and grades improved while depression and school misbehavior declined, compared to the control group (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006).

Emerging adults, too, are often inspired by the vision of a possible self. In fact, one of the distinctive features of emerging adulthood mentioned in Chapter 1 is that it is the “age of possibilities” (Arnett, 2004a). In one Australian study (Whitty, 2002), early emerging adulthood (ages 17 to 22) was found to be a time of “grand dreams” of being wealthy and having a glamorous occupation, but beyond emerging adulthood (ages 28 to 33) the visions of a possible self became more realistic, if still optimistic.

Most scholars who have studied this topic see it as healthiest for adolescents to possess both an ideal self and a feared self. One study that compared delinquent adolescents to other adolescents found that the nondelinquent adolescents tended to have this balance between an ideal self and a feared self. In contrast, the delinquent adolescents possessed a feared self but were less likely than other adolescents to have a clear conception of an ideal self to strive for (Oyserman & Markus, 1990).

## More Complex

A second aspect of adolescents' self-understanding is that it becomes more complex. Again, this is based on a more general cognitive attainment, the formal operational ability to perceive multiple aspects of a situation or idea. Scholars have found that adolescents' self-conceptions become more complex, especially from early adolescence to middle adolescence. Harter (1986) conducted a study in which she asked adolescents in 7th, 9th, and 11th grades to describe themselves. The results showed that the extent to which adolescents described themselves in contradictory ways (e.g., shy and fun-loving) increased sharply from 7th to 9th grade and then declined slightly in 11th grade.

Harter and her colleagues have found that recognizing these contradictions in their personalities and behavior can be confusing to adolescents, as they try to sort out “the real me” from the different aspects of themselves that appear in different situations (Harter, 1999; Harter, Bresnick, Bouche, & Whitesell, 1997). However, adolescents' contradictory descriptions do not necessarily mean that they are confused about which of the two contradictory descriptions apply to their actual selves. To some extent, the contradictions indicate that adolescents, more than younger children,

recognize that their feelings and their behavior can vary from day to day and from situation to situation (Harter, 1990a). Rather than simply saying “I’m shy” as a younger child might, an adolescent might say “I’m shy when I’m around people I don’t really know, but when I’m around my friends I can be kind of wild and crazy.”

A related aspect of the increasing complexity of self-conceptions is that adolescents become aware of times when they are exhibiting a **false self**, a self that they present to others while realizing that it does not represent what they are actually thinking and feeling (Harter et al., 1997; Weir & Jose, 2010). With whom would you think adolescents would be most likely to exhibit their false selves—friends, parents, or dates? Research by Harter and others indicates that adolescents are most likely to put on their false selves with dating partners, and least likely with their close friends, with parents in between (Sippola et al., 2007). Most adolescents in Harter’s research indicate that they sometimes dislike putting on a false self, but many also say that some degree of false self behavior is acceptable and even desirable, to impress someone or to conceal aspects of the self they do not want others to see (Harter et al., 1997).

 **Watch the video**  
Quickly review *Culture and the Self/Self Conceptions* on **MyDevelopmentLab**



Adolescents are most likely to show a false self to dating partners.

## thinking critically

Why do you think a false self is most likely to be shown to dating partners? Would the false self be gradually discarded as the dating partner becomes a boyfriend or girlfriend, or not?

## WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

1. What is the relation between mental health and ideal and feared selves in adolescence?
2. In what way does the self become more complex during adolescence?

## Self-Esteem

- 6.3 Explain how and why self-esteem changes from pre-adolescence through adolescence, including ethnic variations.
- 6.4 List Harter’s 8 domains of self-esteem, and identify which of them has the most influence on global self-esteem in adolescence.
- 6.5 Describe how self-esteem changes from adolescence through emerging adulthood, and why.

**Self-esteem** is a person’s overall sense of worth and well-being. **Self-image**, **self-concept**, and **self-perception** are closely related terms, referring to the way people view and evaluate themselves. A great deal has been written and discussed about self-esteem in the past 50 years in American society, especially concerning adolescents. In the 1960s and 1970s, self-esteem enhancement programs for young people became popular, based on the idea that making children and adolescents “feel better about themselves” would have a variety of positive effects on other aspects of functioning, such as school achievement and relationships with peers (DuBois, 2003; DuBois & Tevendale, 1999; Harter, 1990b). In the 1980s and 1990s, particular concern developed about self-esteem among girls and about evidence showing that girls often experience a drop in self-esteem as they enter adolescence (American Association of University Women, 1993; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990).

All this concern about self-esteem is a distinctly American phenomenon. Americans value high self-esteem to a greater extent than people in other countries, even compared to people in other Western countries, and the gap between Americans and non-Western countries in this respect is especially great (Shweder et al., 2006). For example, in

**false self** The self a person may present to others while realizing that it does not represent what he or she is actually thinking and feeling.

**self-esteem** A person’s overall sense of worth and well-being.

**self-image** A person’s evaluation of his or her qualities and relations with others. Closely related to self-esteem.

**self-concept** Persons’ views of themselves, usually including concrete characteristics (such as height and age) as well as roles, relationships, and personality characteristics.

**self-perception** A person’s view of his or her characteristics and abilities. Closely related to self-esteem.

**baseline self-esteem** A person’s stable, enduring sense of worth and well-being.

**barometric self-esteem** The fluctuating sense of worth and well-being people have as they respond to different thoughts, experiences, and interactions in the course of a day.

traditional Asian culture, self-criticism is a virtue and high self-esteem is a character problem (Falk et al., 2009). The American concern with self-esteem is part of American individualism (Bellah et al., 1985).

The cultural focus on self-esteem in American society has led to a considerable amount of research on adolescent self-esteem by American scholars in recent decades. This research has shed light on a number of issues, including changes in self-esteem from preadolescence through adolescence, different aspects of self-esteem, and influences on self-esteem.

### Self-Esteem From Preadolescence Through Adolescence

Several longitudinal studies of self-esteem have followed samples from preadolescence through adolescence or from adolescence through emerging adulthood, and these studies generally find that self-esteem declines in early adolescence, then rises through late adolescence and emerging adulthood (Huang, 2010; Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005). A number of developmental reasons explain why self-esteem might follow the pattern of a decline in early adolescence followed by a rise in late adolescence and emerging adulthood. The “imaginary audience” that we have discussed as part of adolescents’ cognitive development can make them self-conscious in a way that decreases their self-esteem when they first experience it in early adolescence (Alberts et al., 2007; Elkind, 1967). That is, as adolescents develop the capacity to imagine that others are especially conscious of how they look and what they say and how they act, they may suspect or fear that others are judging them harshly.

And they may be right. Adolescents in Western cultures tend to be strongly peer-oriented and to value the opinion of their peers highly, especially on day-to-day issues such as how they are dressed and what they say in social situations (Berndt, 1996). But as discussed in Chapter 3, their peers have developed new cognitive capacities for sarcasm and ridicule, which tend to be dispensed freely toward any peer who seems odd or awkward or uncool (Eder, 1995; Rosenblum & Way, 2004). So, the combination of greater peer-orientation, greater self-consciousness about evaluations by peers, and peers’ potentially harsh evaluations contributes to declines in self-esteem in early adolescence. Self-esteem rises in late adolescence and emerging adulthood as peers’ evaluations become less important (Berndt, 1986; Galambos et al., 2006).

Diversity in self-esteem also exists among different American ethnic groups. Despite being subject to centuries of slavery, discrimination, and racism, African Americans tend to have higher self-esteem than other ethnic groups, and the difference increases with age from childhood through adolescence and emerging adulthood (Bracly, Bámaca, & Umaña-Taylor, 2004; Gaylord-Harden et al., 2007; Twenge & Crocker, 2002). White adolescents tend to have higher self-esteem than Latinos, Asian Americans, or Native Americans (Twenge & Crocker, 2002). Asian Americans are often lowest in studies that compare the self-esteem of adolescents of different ethnic groups (Rosenblum and Way, 2004). The reasons for these ethnic differences are rooted in cultural differences, with self-esteem promoted most in African American culture and least



African American adolescents have higher self-esteem than adolescents in other ethnic groups.

in Asian American cultures (Greene & Way, 2005). The interdependent self favored in Asian cultures tends to discourage high self-evaluations and encourage a focus on the needs and concerns of others (Heine et al., 1999; Nishikawa et al., 2007).

#### thinking critically

What hypothesis would you propose to explain the ethnic differences in adolescent self-esteem described above? How would you test your hypothesis?

### Different Aspects of Self-Esteem

As scholars have studied self-esteem, they have concluded that it has different aspects in addition to overall self-esteem. Morris Rosenberg, the scholar who developed the widely used Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, distinguished between baseline self-esteem and barometric self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1986). **Baseline self-esteem** is a person’s stable, enduring sense of worth and well-being. People with high baseline self-esteem might have an occasional bad day in which they feel incompetent or self-critical, but still have high baseline self-esteem because most days they evaluate themselves positively. In contrast, people with low baseline self-esteem might continue to have a poor opinion of themselves even though they have some days when things go well and they have positive feelings about themselves.

**Barometric self-esteem** is the fluctuating sense of worth and well-being people have as they respond to different thoughts, experiences, and interactions in the course of a day. According to Rosenberg, early adolescence is a time when

variations in barometric self-esteem are especially intense (Rosenberg, 1986). An adolescent might have a disagreement with a parent over breakfast and feel miserable, then go to school and have some fun with friends before class and feel good, then get back a test in biology with a poor grade and feel miserable again, then get a smile from an attractive potential love interest and feel great—all in just a few hours.

The Experience Sampling Method (ESM) studies, in which adolescents wear beeper watches and record their moods and activities when beeped at random times, confirm Rosenberg's insights by showing just this kind of rapid fluctuation of moods among adolescents in a typical day (Larson & Richards, 1994). ESM studies find that adults and preadolescents experience changes in their moods as well, but not with the same frequency or intensity as adolescents. Other studies confirm that adolescents' self-esteem varies depending on who they are with (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1998). Furthermore, adolescents vary in how much their barometric self-esteem fluctuates, with some relatively stable across time and contexts and some highly variable (Harter & Whitesell, 2003). The more enjoyable and secure their social relationships, the more stable their self-esteem is.

Other aspects of adolescent self-esteem have been investigated by Susan Harter (1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006a). Her *Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents* distinguishes the following eight domains of adolescent self-image:

- Scholastic competence
- Social acceptance
- Athletic competence
- Physical appearance
- Job competence
- Romantic appeal
- Behavioral conduct
- Close friendship.

Examples of items from each subscale are provided in the Research Focus box, along with more information about the scale. In addition to the eight subscales on specific domains of self-esteem, Harter's scale also contains a subscale for global (overall) self-esteem.

Harter's research indicates that adolescents do not need to have a positive self-image in all domains to have high global self-esteem. Each domain of self-image influences global self-esteem only to the extent that the adolescent views that domain as important. For example, some adolescents may view themselves as having low athletic competence, but that would influence their global self-esteem only if it was important to them to be good at athletics. Nevertheless, some domains of self-esteem are more important than others to most adolescents, as we will see in the next section.

## Self-Esteem and Physical Appearance

Which of Harter's eight aspects of self-image would you expect to be most important in adolescence? Research by Harter and others has found that physical appearance is most strongly related to global self-esteem, followed by social acceptance from peers (Barker & Bornstein, 2010; Harter, 2006a, 2006b; Shapka & Keating, 2005). A similar link between physical appearance and self-esteem has been found for emerging adults (Mendelson, Mendelson, & Andrews, 2000).

Adolescent girls are more likely than boys to emphasize physical appearance as a basis for self-esteem. This gender difference largely explains the gender difference in self-esteem that occurs at adolescence in most Western cultures (Gentile et al., 2009). Girls have a more negative body image than boys in adolescence and are more critical of their physical appearance. They are less satisfied with the shape of their bodies than boys are, and the majority of them believe they weigh too much and have attempted to diet (Barker & Bornstein, 2010). Because girls tend to evaluate their physical appearance negatively, and because physical appearance is at the heart of their global self-esteem, girls' self-esteem tends to be lower than boys' during adolescence (Frost & McKelvie, 2004; Klomsten, Skaalvik, & Espnes, 2004; Shapka & Keating, 2005).

The prominence of physical appearance as a source of self-esteem also helps explain why girls' self-esteem is especially likely to decline as they enter early adolescence. As we have seen in Chapter 2, girls are often highly ambivalent about the changes that take place in their physical appearance when they reach puberty. Reaching puberty means becoming more womanly, which is good, but becoming more womanly means gaining weight in certain places, which is not good in some cultures. Because the physical ideal for American females is so thin, reaching an age where nature promotes rounder body development makes it difficult for adolescent girls to feel good about themselves (Frost & McKelvie, 2004). The focus on physical attractiveness as a source of self-esteem is further promoted by the fact that reaching adolescence also means facing evaluations from others as a potential romantic/sexual partner, and for girls especially, physical attractiveness is the primary criterion for this evaluation (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2004).

It should be emphasized that the research that has found a decline in girls' self-esteem in adolescence and a gender difference in perceived physical appearance has been mainly on White adolescents. Evidence indicates that African American girls evaluate their physical appearance quite differently than White girls do (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2007). In one study of middle school and high school girls, 40% of the African American girls were satisfied with their bodies, compared with just 20% of the White girls (Kelly et al., 2005). This ethnic difference in perceived physical appearance helps explain why White American girls tend to have lower self-esteem than boys in

**response bias** On a questionnaire, the tendency to choose the same response for all items.

**internal consistency** A statistical calculation that indicates the extent to which the different items in a scale or subscale are answered in a similar way.

## RESEARCH **f**OCUS Harter's Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents

The most widely used measure of the self in adolescence is Susan Harter's (1988, 1999, 2003, 2006a, 2006b) Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents. The scale consists of nine subscales of five items each, for a total of 45 items. Eight of the subscales assess specific domains of self-image, and the ninth subscale assesses overall ("global") self-worth. The format of the items is to present two statements about "teenagers." The adolescent then selects which of the statements most applies to him or her, and whether the statement is "sort of true for me" or "really true for me." Examples of items from each subscale are shown in **Table 6.1**.

Notice that for some items, the response that signifies high self-esteem comes first (before the "BUT"), whereas for other items the high self-esteem response comes second (after the "BUT"). The reason for this variation is to avoid a **response bias**, which is the tendency to choose the same response for all items. If the high self-esteem response came first for all items, after a few items an adolescent might start simply checking the first box without reading the item closely. Altering the arrangement of the items helps to avoid a response bias.

Reliability and validity are two qualities sought in any questionnaire. To establish the reliability of the subscales, Harter calculated the **internal consistency** of each one. Internal consistency

is a statistic that indicates the extent to which the different items in a scale or subscale are answered in a similar way. Harter's subscales showed high internal consistency, which means that adolescents who reported a positive self-perception on one item of a subscale also tended to report a positive self-perception on the other items of the subscale, and adolescents who reported a negative self-perception on one item of a subscale also tended to report a negative self-perception on the other items.

What about the validity of the scale? Recall from Chapter 1 that the validity of a scale is the extent to which it really measures what it claims to measure. One way to establish validity is to see whether findings using the scale are consistent with findings using other methods. Research using the Harter scale has found that girls rate themselves lower than boys on physical appearance and global self-worth, but higher than boys on close friendships (Harter, 1988, 1999, 2006b). Because these findings are consistent with findings from other studies, the findings appear to support the validity of the Harter scale. However, Harter's research has taken place mostly on adolescents in the American middle class. The measure may not be as valid for adolescents in other cultures, especially in Eastern cultures such as Japan and China, in which it is socially disapproved to evaluate yourself positively (Nishikawa et al., 2007).

**TABLE 6.1** Sample Items From the *Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents*

### Scholastic Competence

Some teenagers have trouble figuring out the answers in school BUT Other teenagers almost always can figure out the answers.

### Social Acceptance

Some teenagers are popular with others their age BUT Other teenagers are not very popular.

### Athletic Competence

Some teenagers do not feel that they are very athletic BUT Other teenagers feel that they are very athletic.

### Physical Appearance

Some teenagers think that they are good looking BUT Other teenagers think that they are not very good looking.

### Job Competence

Some teenagers feel that they are ready to do well at a part-time job BUT Other teenagers feel that they are not quite ready to handle a part-time job.

### Romantic Appeal

Some teenagers feel that other people their age will be romantically attracted to them BUT Other teenagers worry about whether people their age will be attracted to them.

### Behavioral Conduct

Some teenagers often get in trouble for the things they do BUT Other teenagers usually don't do things that get them in trouble.

### Close Friendship

Some teenagers are able to make really close friends BUT Other teenagers find it hard to make really close friends.

### Global Self-Worth

Some teenagers are happy with themselves most of the time BUT Other teenagers are often not happy with themselves.

Source: Harter (1988).



Girls compare their own bodies to our cultural ideals and find them wanting. Dieting and dissatisfaction with bodies have become normal reactions to puberty. . . . Girls are terrified of being fat, as well they should be. Girls hear the remarks made about heavy girls in the halls of their schools. No one feels thin enough. Because of guilt and shame about their bodies, young women are constantly on the defensive. . . . Almost all adolescent girls feel fat, worry about their weight, diet and feel guilty when they eat.

—Mary Pipher (1994), *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, pp. 184–185

adolescence, whereas in American minority groups the reverse is true (Greene & Way, 2005; Mendelson et al., 2000). However, some evidence suggests that Black and Asian young women evaluate themselves according to skin color, with those having relatively dark skin also having negative perceptions of their attractiveness (Hill, 2002; Phillips, 2004).

### Causes and Effects of Self-Esteem

What leads some adolescents to have high self-esteem and others to have low self-esteem? Feeling accepted and approved by others—especially parents and peers—is the influence identified by theorists and researchers as the most important (DuBois, 2003; Greene & Way, 2005; Farruggia et al., 2004). As noted earlier, because peers become especially prominent in the social world of adolescents they gain considerable power over self-esteem in adolescence compared with earlier ages, but parents are important as well. Although adolescents often spend less time with their parents and have more conflict with them than before adolescence, adolescents' relationships with parents remain crucial to their perceptions of themselves. If parents provide love and encouragement, adolescent self-esteem is enhanced; if parents are denigrating or indifferent, adolescents respond with lower self-esteem (Berenson et al., 2005; Ojanen & Perry, 2007). Approval from adults outside the family, especially teachers, contributes to self-esteem as well (Dusek & McIntyre, 2003).

School success has also been found to be related to self-esteem in adolescence, especially for Asian American adolescents (Rivas-Drake et al., 2008). But which comes first? Do adolescents gain in self-esteem when they do well in school, or does self-esteem directly influence adolescents' performance in school? In the 1960s and 1970s, the predominant belief in American education was that self-esteem is more of a cause of school success than a consequence.

Numerous programs were instituted to try to enhance students' self-esteem, by praising them and trying to teach them to praise themselves, in the hopes that this would raise their school performance. However, scholars eventually concluded that these programs did not work (Baumeister et al., 2007). More recent studies have shown that school success

and self-esteem are mutually reinforcing: doing well in school enhances self-esteem in children and adolescents, which in turn gives them confidence that promotes further school success (Roskam & Nils, 2007). It is possible for self-esteem to be too high as well as too low: Adolescents who have inflated self-esteem—that is, they rate themselves more favorably than parents, teachers, and peers rate them—tend to have greater conduct problems in the classroom, compared with their peers (Baumeister et al., 2007). The best way to improve adolescents' school-related self-esteem is to teach them knowledge and skills that can be the basis of real achievements in the classroom (Bednar, Wells, & Peterson, 1995; DuBois, 2003).

In other areas of functioning, the question of the effects of self-esteem is controversial, with some scholars claiming that self-esteem has a wide range of effects whereas others argue that, like the findings regarding school performance, functioning in other areas is a cause of self-esteem rather than an effect (Baumeister et al., 2007; Donnellan et al., 2005). One study indicates that the effects of self-esteem may depend on which domains are high and which are low (Wild, Flisher, Bhana, & Lombard, 2004). *Low* self-esteem in the family and school domains and *high* self-esteem in the peer domain were associated with multiple risk behaviors in adolescents of both sexes.

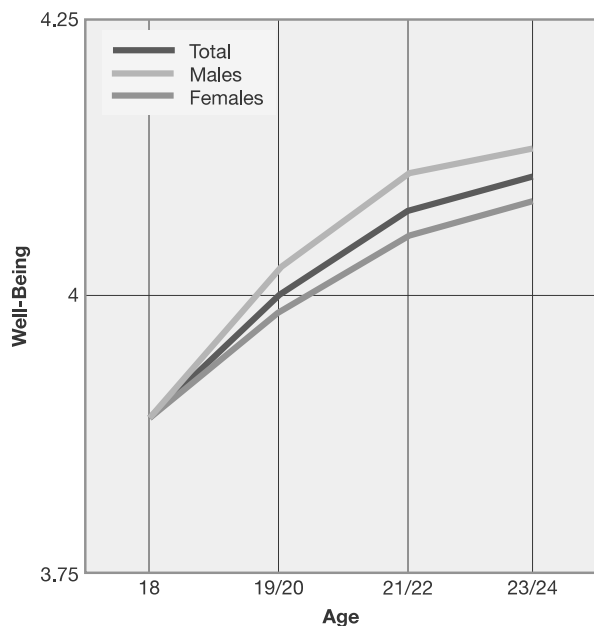
### applying your knowledge

Americans generally consider it healthy to have high self-esteem. Is it possible for self-esteem to be too high? If so, how would you be able to tell when that point is reached? Is it subjective, based simply on each person's opinion, or could you define that point objectively?

### Self-Esteem in Emerging Adulthood

Although self-esteem tends to decline from preadolescence to adolescence, for most people it rises during emerging adulthood (Galambos, Barker, & Krahn, 2006; Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2001; Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). **Figure 6.1** shows this pattern. There are a number of reasons why self-esteem increases over this period. Physical appearance is important to adolescents' self-esteem, and by emerging adulthood most people have passed through the awkward changes of puberty and may be more comfortable with how they look. Also, feeling accepted and approved by parents contributes to self-esteem, and from adolescence to emerging adulthood relationships with parents generally improve while conflict diminishes (Arnett, 2004a; Galambos et al., 2006). Peers and friends are also important to self-esteem, and entering emerging adulthood means leaving the social pressure cooker of secondary school, where peer evaluations are a part of daily life and can be harsh (Pascoe, 2007).

Also, reaching emerging adulthood usually means having more control over the social contexts of everyday life, which makes it possible for emerging adults to emphasize the contexts they prefer and avoid the contexts they find disagreeable, in a way that adolescents cannot. For example, adolescents who dislike school and do poorly have little choice



**FIGURE 6.1** Self-esteem rises during emerging adulthood.

Source: Monitoring the Future (2003).

but to attend school, where poor grades may repeatedly undermine their self-esteem. However, in emerging adulthood they can leave school and instead engage in full-time work that they may find more gratifying and enjoyable, thus enhancing their self-esteem.

### WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

1. What explains why African American girls are relatively high in self-esteem during adolescence?
2. Among Harter's domains, which contribute the most to global self-esteem during adolescence?
3. Is school achievement generally a cause of self-esteem or a consequence?
4. What are some reasons why self-esteem rises in emerging adulthood?

## The Emotional Self

### 6.6 Summarize the evidence for emotional volatility in adolescence.

### 6.7 Evaluate the claim that girls lose their "voice" in adolescence.

Among the issues of the self that adolescents confront is how to understand and manage their emotions. One of the most ancient and enduring observations of adolescence is that it is a time of heightened emotions. Over 2,000 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle observed that youth "are heated by Nature as drunken men by wine." About 250 years ago, the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau made a similar observation: "As the roaring of the waves precedes the tempest, so the murmur of rising passions



Negative moods become more common in adolescence.

announces the tumultuous change" of puberty and adolescence. Around the same time that Rousseau was writing, a type of German literature was developing that became known as *sturm und drang* literature—German for "storm and stress." In these stories, young people in their teens and early 20s experienced extreme emotions of angst, sadness, and romantic passion. Today, too, most American parents see adolescence as a time of heightened emotional fluctuations (Buchanan, 2003).

What does contemporary research tell us about the validity of these historical and popular ideas about adolescent emotionality? Probably the best sources of data on this question are the ESM studies, in which people record their emotions and experiences when they are "beeped" at random times during the day (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Goldner et al., 2011; Larson & Richards, 1994). What makes the ESM method especially valuable for addressing the question of adolescent emotionality is that it assesses emotions at numerous specific moments, rather than having adolescents make an overall judgment of their emotional fluctuations. Furthermore, ESM studies have also been conducted on preadolescents and adults. Thus, if we compare the patterns of emotions reported by the different groups, we can get a good sense of whether adolescents report more extremes of emotions than preadolescents or adults.

The results indicate that they do (Larson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Graef, 1980; Larson & Richards, 1994). Adolescents report feeling "self-conscious" and "embarrassed" two to three times more often than their parents and are also more likely than their parents to feel awkward, lonely, nervous, and ignored. Adolescents are also moodier when compared to preadolescents. Comparing preadolescent 5th graders to adolescent 8th graders, Larson and Richards (1994) describe the emotional "fall from grace" that occurs during that time, as the proportion of time experienced as "very happy" declines by 50%, and similar declines take place in reports

of feeling “great,” “proud,” and “in control.” The result is an overall “deflation of childhood happiness” (p. 85) as childhood ends and adolescence begins. This finding is consistent with the decline in self-esteem described previously.

Brain development may contribute to adolescents’ emotionality (Giedd, 2002). In one study comparing adolescents (ages 10 to 18) to emerging adults and young adults (ages 20 to 40), participants were shown pictures of faces displaying strong emotions (Baird et al., 1999). When adolescents processed the emotional information from the photos, brain activity was especially high in the amygdala, a primitive part of the brain involved in emotions, and relatively low in the frontal lobes, the part of the brain involved in higher functions such as reasoning and planning. The reverse was true for adults. This seems to indicate that adolescents often respond to emotional stimuli more with the heart than with the head, whereas adults tend to respond in a more controlled and rational way. Studies also indicate that the hormonal changes of puberty contribute to increased emotionality in early adolescence (Susman & Rogol, 2004).

However, most scholars see these emotional changes as due to cognitive and environmental factors more than to biological changes (Barrocas & Hankin, 2011; Susman & Rogol, 2004). According to Larson and Richards (1994), adolescents’ newly developed capacities for abstract reasoning “allow them to see beneath the surface of situations and envision hidden and more long-lasting threats to their well-being” (p. 86). Larson and Richards (1994) also argue that experiencing multiple life changes and personal transitions during adolescence (such as the onset of puberty, changing schools, and the first romantic and sexual experiences) contributes to adolescents’ emotional volatility. Nevertheless, Larson and Richards (1994) emphasize that it is not just that adolescents experience potentially stressful events but *how* they experience and interpret them that underlies their emotional volatility. Even in response to the same or similar events, adolescents report more extreme and negative moods than preadolescents or adults.

How does emotionality change during the course of adolescence? Larson and Richards assessed their original ESM sample of 5th to 8th graders four years later, in 9th to 12th grades (Larson et al., 2002). As **Figure 6.2** shows, they found that the decline in positive emotional states continued through 9th and 10th grades and then leveled out. Also, the older adolescents were less volatile in their emotions; that is, the changes in their emotions from one time to the next were less extreme.

### thinking critically

Adolescent girls have lower overall self-esteem than adolescent boys, yet boys have lower average emotional states than girls do. Is this a contradiction, or is it possible that both these findings could be true?

What about other cultures? Is adolescent emotionality especially an American phenomenon, or does it take place in other cultures as well? Only limited evidence is available to

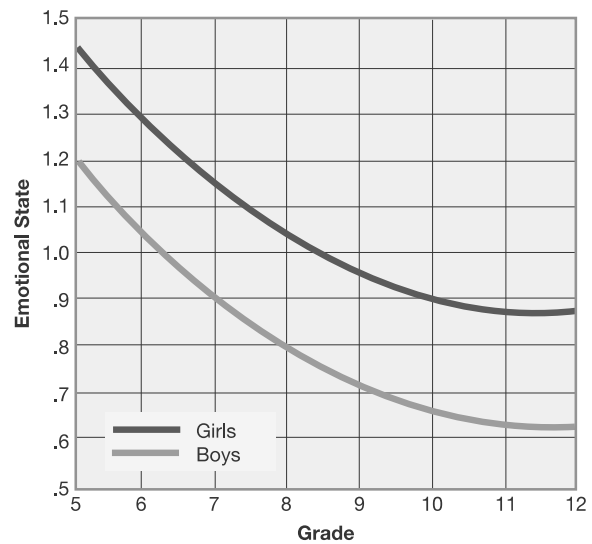


FIGURE 6.2 Decline in average emotional state from grades 5–12.

Source: Larson et al., (2002).

answer this question. However, in one study the ESM method was used with adolescents and their parents in India (Verma & Larson, 1999). The results indicated that, in India as in the United States, adolescents reported more extremes of emotion than their parents did.

Few studies have examined emotionality in emerging adulthood, but one longitudinal study found that from ages 18 to 25, negative emotions (such as feeling depressed or angry) decrease (Galambos et al., 2006). This finding fits well with the research on self-esteem in showing that for most people the self becomes happier and more stable from adolescence to emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004a).

### Gender and the Emotional Self: Do Adolescent Girls Lose Their “Voice”?

One of the most influential theorists on the self-development of girls in adolescence has been Carol Gilligan. In Chapter 4, we discussed how Gilligan and her colleagues have proposed that adolescent girls and boys tend to think differently about moral issues, with girls emphasizing care and boys emphasizing justice. Gilligan and her colleagues have also argued that there are gender differences in the self in adolescence. They claim that early adolescence is a crucial turning point in self-development, in which boys learn to assert their opinions, whereas girls lose their “voice” and become reticent and insecure (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 2008; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990).

In Gilligan’s view, from early childhood onward girls and boys differ in their emotional responses to social relationships. She sees girls as more sensitive to the nuances of human relationships from an early age, more observant of the subtleties of social interactions, and more interested in cultivating emotional intimacy in their relationships with others. Girls have a “different voice” than boys, not just in their views of moral issues but in their views of human relationships more generally.



According to Carol Gilligan, girls risk losing confidence in themselves when they reach adolescence.

Early adolescence is crucial, according to Gilligan, because it is at this point that girls become aware of an irreconcilable conflict in the gender expectations that the American majority culture has for females. On the one hand, girls perceive that independence and assertiveness are valued in their culture, and that people who are ambitious and competitive are most likely to be rewarded in their education and in their careers. On the other hand, they perceive that their culture values females mainly for their physical appearance and for feminine traits such as nurturance and care for others, and rejects girls and women as selfish when they show the traits the culture rewards most, such as independence and competitiveness. As a result, girls in early adolescence typically succumb to the gender socialization of their culture and become more insecure and tentative about their abilities, more likely to mute their voices in an effort to be socially accepted. At the extreme, according to Gilligan, the muting of girls' voices is reflected in an escalation in such problems as depression and eating disorders when girls reach adolescence.

In her views of adolescent girls' emotional development, Gilligan's influence has been profound. Her writings have received a wide audience, not just in the social sciences but also among the general public. A clinical psychologist, Mary Pipher (1994), wrote a book called *Reviving Ophelia*, drawing heavily on Gilligan's ideas about the emotional selves of adolescent girls, and it became a bestseller. One of the schools in which Gilligan has conducted her research, a private girls' school in upstate New York, was so impressed by Gilligan's findings that school authorities revised the entire school curriculum in an effort to preserve girls' voices in adolescence by emphasizing cooperation over competition and making special efforts to encourage girls to express themselves.

However, here as in her research in moral development, Gilligan has attracted as many critics as admirers. These critics have argued that Gilligan exaggerates the differences between boys and girls in adolescence (Farady, 2010; Sommers, 2000; Tavris, 1992). For example, it is true that girls' self-esteem declines in early adolescence, but boys' self-esteem declines as well, something Gilligan rarely acknowledges

(e.g., DuBois et al., 1996). A related criticism is of Gilligan's research methods. As in her studies of moral development, her studies of gender differences in the self in adolescence have rarely included boys. She studies girls and then makes assumptions about how they differ from the patterns that might be found among boys. Also, she typically presents the results of her research only in the form of excerpts from the interviews she and her colleagues have conducted, and commentaries on those excerpts. Critics find this approach weak methodologically and difficult to judge for reliability and validity (Farady, 2010; Sommers, 2000).

Although Gilligan's research methods may have certain flaws, other researchers have explored the issues she has raised, using more rigorous methods. In one study, Susan Harter and her colleagues examined Gilligan's idea of losing one's voice in adolescence, but they included boys as well as girls (Harter et al., 1997; Harter, Waters, Whitesell, & Kastic, 1998). Harter and colleagues gave the adolescents a questionnaire to measure the degree of their "voice" (expressing an opinion, disagreeing, etc.), and another questionnaire to measure the degree of their self-reported masculinity and femininity. The results indicated some support for Gilligan's theory, in that "feminine" girls reported lower levels of "voice" than boys did. In contrast, androgynous girls—those who reported having both masculine and feminine traits—were equal to boys in "voice." However, Harter's research does not support Gilligan's claim that girls' "voice" declines as they enter adolescence (Harter, 1999). Only the more "feminine" girls were lower than boys in "voice," not girls in general.

### applying your knowledge

Based on your experience and observation, do you agree or disagree with Gilligan's view that girls lose their "voice" in adolescence? Do boys?

### WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

1. Which appears to contribute most to emotional volatility in adolescence, brain development or social influences?
2. Under what conditions do girls lose their "voice" in adolescence, according to research?

### Identity

- 6.8 Connect Erikson's theory of identity development to the identity status model on which most research is based.
- 6.9 Evaluate Erikson's theory from the perspective of postmodern theory, and note the theory's limitations concerning gender and culture.
- 6.10 Describe Phinney's model of ethnic identity in adolescence.
- 6.11 Explain how globalization is influencing identity development in adolescence and emerging adulthood.

## HISTORICAL focus Young Man Luther

Among Erik Erikson's many innovative contributions to the field of human development were his studies in **psychohistory**, which is the psychological analysis of important historical figures. His most extensive works of psychohistory were his analyses of the development of Mohandas K. Gandhi, the leader of the independence movement in India in the mid-20th century, and Martin Luther, the theologian and leader of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. His study of Luther is of particular interest for our purposes because he focused on Luther's development during adolescence and emerging adulthood. In fact, the title of his book on Luther is *Young Man Luther* (1958).

According to Erikson, two events were especially important in Luther's identity formation. The first event took place in 1505, when Luther was 21. He was about to begin studying law. Since his childhood, his father had decreed that he would become a lawyer, and he was on the verge of fulfilling his father's dream. However, shortly before beginning his first semester of law school, as he was traveling to the college where he was to be enrolled, he was caught in a severe thunderstorm. A bolt of lightning struck the ground close to where he was taking shelter from the storm and



Martin Luther as a young man.

may even have thrown him to the ground. In his terror, he cried out to St. Anne for protection from the storm and promised that he would become a monk if he survived. The storm abated, and a few days later Luther entered a monastery in accordance with his promise to St. Anne—without informing his father, who was enraged when he learned what Luther had done.

The second event took place two years later, when Luther was 23. He was with his fellow monks in the choir of the monastery, listening to a reading from the Bible that described Jesus' cure of a man who was possessed by a demon (Mark 9:17). Suddenly, Luther threw himself to the ground, raving and roaring "It isn't me! It isn't me!" Erikson (and others) interpreted this event as indicating the depth of Luther's fear that he could never eradicate his sense of moral and spiritual inadequacy, no matter what he did, no matter how good a monk he was. By shouting "It isn't me!" Luther "showed himself possessed even as he tried most loudly to deny it" (Erikson, 1958, p. 23). Erikson and others have seen this event as pivotal in Luther's identity development. His sense that nothing he could do would be good enough to make him holy in the eyes of God eventually led him to reject the Catholic Church's emphasis

For me, I'm exploring who I am—trying to find out more who I am, because I'm not really sure any more. Because up till about seventh grade, I was just a kid. I was me and I never really thought about it. But now I've thought about it a lot more and I'm starting to have to make decisions about who I want to be.

—Conrad, age 13 (in Bell, 1998, p. 72)

One of the most distinctive features of adolescence is that it is a time of thinking about who you are, where your life is going, what you believe in, and how your life fits into the world around you. These are all issues of **identity**. It is the adolescent's nascent capacity for self-reflection that makes consideration of identity issues

possible. Adolescents are able to consider themselves in the abstract, in the "third person," in a way that younger children cannot. During adolescence and continuing through emerging adulthood, explorations are made into various aspects of identity, culminating in commitments that set the foundation for adult life.

Because adolescence and emerging adulthood are crucial periods for identity development, theorists and researchers have devoted a considerable amount of attention to this topic. In this section, we will look first at Erikson's theory of the adolescent identity crisis, then at the research that has been conducted to explore Erikson's theory. After that, we will consider the roles of gender and culture in adolescent identity development, with a special focus on ethnic identity.

**psychohistory** The psychological analysis of important historical figures.

**identity** Individuals' perceptions of their characteristics and abilities, their beliefs and values, their relations with others, and how their lives fit into the world around them.

**identity versus identity confusion** Erikson's term for the crisis typical of the adolescent stage of life, in which individuals may follow the healthy path of establishing a clear and definite sense of who they are and how they fit into the world around them, or follow the unhealthy alternative of failing to form a stable and secure identity.

on doing good works to earn entry into heaven and to create a new religious doctrine based on the idea that faith and faith alone was enough to make a person worthy and saved before God.

Erikson's study of Luther illustrates several aspects of his theory of identity formation. First, Erikson viewed identity formation as centering on an identity crisis. More recent theorists and researchers tend to use the term *exploration* rather than *crisis* to describe the process of identity formation, but Erikson used the term *crisis* deliberately. As he wrote in *Young Man Luther*:

Only in ill health does one realize the intricacy of the body; and only in a crisis, individual or historical, does it become obvious what a sensitive combination of interrelated factors the human personality is—a combination of capacities created in the distant past and of opportunities divined in the present; a combination of totally unconscious preconditions developed in individual growth and of social conditions created and recreated in the precarious interplay of generations. In some young people, in some classes, at some periods in history, this crisis will be minimal; in other people, classes, and periods, the crisis will be clearly marked off as a critical period, a kind of “second birth,” apt to be aggravated either by widespread neuroticisms or by pervasive ideological unrest. . . . Luther, so it seems, was a rather endangered young man, beset with a syndrome of conflicts. (pp. 14–15)

Thus, Erikson viewed Luther's youth, including the two crisis events described above, as an extreme example of the

identity crisis that all adolescents go through in one form or another.

Second, Erikson's study of Luther shows his sensitivity to the cultural and historical context of identity development. Throughout the book, Erikson emphasizes the match between Luther's unusual personality and the historical and cultural circumstances in which he lived. Had Luther grown up in a different time and place, he would have developed a much different identity. In analyzing Luther, Erikson shows the importance in identity development of the person looking inward and assessing his or her individual abilities and inclinations, then looking outward to possibilities available in the social and cultural environment. Successful identity development lies in reconciling the individual's abilities and desires with the possibilities and opportunities offered in the environment.

Third, in describing Luther's development Erikson shows that identity formation reaches a critical point during the identity crisis, but it begins before that time and continues well after. In explaining Luther, Erikson describes not only his adolescence and emerging adulthood but also his childhood, particularly his relationship with his loving but domineering father. Also, Erikson describes how Luther's identity continued to develop through his adulthood. The two key crises took place in his early 20s, but it was not until his early 30s that he broke away from the Catholic Church and established a new, separate form of Christianity. In the decades that followed, his identity developed further as he married, had children, and continued to develop his religious ideas.

## Erikson's Theory

Erik Erikson (1902–1994) is one of the most influential scholars in the history of the study of adolescent development. Indeed, he has had a substantial influence on the study of human development from infancy to old age. Drawing on his diverse experience as a teacher, psychoanalyst, ethnographer among Native Americans, and therapist of World War II veterans, he developed a comprehensive theory of human development across the life span. However, the primary focus of Erikson's work was on adolescence, and adolescent development is where he has had his greatest influence.

In Erikson's theory of human development, each period of life is characterized by a distinctive developmental issue or “crisis,” as he described in his classic book *Childhood and Society* (Erikson, 1950). Each of these crises holds the potential for a healthy path of development and an unhealthy path. For example, Erikson views infancy as a period of *trust versus mistrust*. Infant development follows a healthy path, in Erikson's theory, when the infant establishes a secure sense of trust with at least one person who can be counted on to provide protection and loving care. The unhealthy path is mistrust, which results from a failure to establish that secure sense of trust.

Each stage of life has a central crisis of this kind, according to Erikson (1950). In adolescence, the crisis is **identity versus identity confusion**. The healthy path in adolescence involves establishing a clear and definite sense of who you are and how you fit into the world around you. The unhealthy alternative is identity confusion, which is a failure to form a stable and secure identity. Identity formation involves reflecting on what your traits, abilities, and interests are, and then sifting through the range of life choices available in your culture, trying out various possibilities, and ultimately making commitments. The key areas in which identity is formed are love, work, and ideology (beliefs and values) (Erikson, 1968). In Erikson's view, a failure to establish commitments in these areas by the end of adolescence reflects identity confusion.

Erikson did not assert that adolescence is the only time when identity issues arise and that once adolescence is over identity issues have been resolved, never to return. Identity issues exist early in life, from the time children first realize they have an existence separate from others, and continue far beyond adolescence as adults continue to ask themselves questions about who they are and how they fit into the world around them. As Erikson observed, “A sense of identity is never gained nor maintained once and for all. . . . It is constantly lost and regained” (1959, p. 118).



Erik Erikson proposed that the central developmental issue of adolescence is identity versus identity confusion.

Nevertheless, Erikson saw adolescence as the time when identity issues are most prominent and most crucial to development. Furthermore, Erikson argued that it is important to establish a clear identity in adolescence as a basis for initial commitments in adult life and as a foundation for later stages of development. Erikson viewed this as true of all his stages; developing via the healthy path provides a stable foundation for the next stage of development, whereas developing via the unhealthy path is problematic not only in that stage but as an unreliable foundation for the stages to come.

How does an adolescent develop a healthy identity? In Erikson's view, identity formation is founded partly in the **identifications** the adolescent has accumulated in childhood (Erikson, 1968). Children *identify* with their parents and

other loved ones as they grow up—that is, children love and admire them and want to be like them. When adolescence comes, adolescents reflect on their identifications, rejecting some and embracing others. The ones that remain are integrated into the adolescent self, combined of course with the adolescent's own individual characteristics. Thus, adolescents create an identity in part by modeling themselves after parents, friends, and others they have loved in childhood, not simply imitating them but integrating parts of their loved ones' behavior and attitudes into their own personality.

The other key process that contributes to identity formation, according to Erikson, is exploring various possible life options. Erikson described adolescence as often including a **psychosocial moratorium**, a period when adult responsibilities are postponed as young people try on various possible selves. Thus, falling in love is part of identity formation because during this process you get a clearer sense of yourself through intimate interactions with other persons. Trying out various possible jobs—and, for college students, various possible majors—is part of identity formation, too, because these explorations give you a clearer sense of what you are good at and what you truly enjoy. Erikson saw ideological exploration as part of identity formation as well. "Trying out" a set of religious or political beliefs by learning about them and participating in organizations centered around a particular set of beliefs serves to clarify for adolescents what they believe and how they wish to live. In Erikson's view, the psychosocial moratorium is not characteristic of all societies but only those with individualistic values, in which individual choice is supported (Erikson, 1968).

Most young people in Western societies go through the explorations of the psychosocial moratorium and then settle on more enduring choices in love, work, and ideology as they enter adulthood. However, some young people find it difficult to sort out the possibilities that life presents to them, and they remain in a state of identity confusion after their peers have gone on to establish a secure identity. For many of these adolescents, according to Erikson, this may be a result of unsuccessful adaptation in previous stages of development. Just as identity formation provides the foundation for further development in adulthood, development in childhood provides the basis for development in adolescence. If development in any of the earlier stages has been unusually problematic, then identity confusion is more likely to be the outcome of adolescent development. For other adolescents, identity confusion may be the result of an inability to sort through all the choices available to them and decide among them.

At the extreme, according to Erikson, such adolescents may develop a **negative identity**, "an identity perversely based on all those identifications and roles which, at critical stages

**identifications** Relationships formed with others, especially in childhood, in which love for another person leads one to want to be like that person.

**psychosocial moratorium** Erikson's term for a period during adolescence when adult responsibilities are postponed as young people try on various possible selves.

**negative identity** Erikson's term for an identity based on what a person has seen portrayed as most undesirable or dangerous.

of development, had been presented to them as most undesirable or dangerous” (Erikson, 1968, p. 174). Such adolescents reject the range of acceptable possibilities for love, work, and ideology offered by their society, and instead deliberately embrace what their society considers unacceptable, strange, contemptible, and offensive. Youth subcultures such as skinheads and “metalheads” (fans of heavy metal music) have been formed by adolescents who share a negative identity (Arnett, 1996; Roe, 1992).

## Research on Identity

Erikson was primarily a theoretical writer and a therapist rather than a researcher, but his ideas have inspired a wealth of research over the past 30 years. One of Erikson’s most influential interpreters has been James Marcia (1966, 1980, 1989, 1993, 1994, 1999; Marcia & Carpendale, 2004). Marcia constructed a measure called the Identity Status Interview that classified adolescents into one of four identity statuses: *diffusion*, *moratorium*, *foreclosure*, or *achievement*. This system of four categories, known as the **identity status model**, has also been used by scholars who have constructed questionnaires to investigate identity development in adolescence rather than using Marcia’s interview (e.g., Adams, 1999; Benson, Harris, & Rogers, 1992; Grotevant & Adams, 1984; Kroger, 2007).

As shown in **Table 6.2**, each of these classifications involves a different combination of exploration and commitment. Erikson (1968) used the term **identity crisis** to describe the process through which young people construct their identity, but Marcia and other current scholars prefer the term *exploration* (Adams et al., 1992; Grotevant, 1987; Kroger, 2007; Marcia & Carpendale, 2004; Waterman, 1992, 2007). Crisis implies that the process inherently involves anguish and struggle, whereas exploration implies a more positive investigation of possibilities.

**Identity diffusion** is a status that combines no exploration with no commitment. For adolescents in identity diffusion, no commitments have been made among the choices available to them. Furthermore, no exploration is taking place. The adolescent at this stage is not seriously attempting to sort through potential choices and make enduring commitments.

**Identity moratorium** involves exploration but no commitment. This is a stage of actively trying out different personal,

Is the sense of identity conscious? At times, of course, it seems only too conscious. For between the double prongs of inner need and inexorable outer demand, the as yet experimenting individual may become the victim of a transitory extreme identity consciousness, which is the common core of the many forms of “self-consciousness” typical for youth. Where the processes of identity formation are prolonged (a factor which can bring creative gain), such preoccupation with the “self-image” also prevails. We are thus most aware of our identity when we are just about to gain it and when we (with that startle which motion pictures call a “double take”) are somewhat surprised to make its acquaintance; or, again, when we are just about to enter a crisis and feel the encroachment of identity confusion.

—Erik Erikson (1968), p. 165

occupational, and ideological possibilities. This classification is based on Erikson’s (1968) idea of the psychosocial moratorium, discussed earlier. Different possibilities are being tried on, sifted through, some discarded and some selected, in order for adolescents to be able to determine which of the available possibilities are best suited to them.

Adolescents who are in the **identity foreclosure** classification have not experimented with a range of possibilities but have nevertheless committed themselves to certain choices—commitment, but no exploration. This is often a result of their parents’ strong influence. Marcia and most other scholars tend to see exploration as a necessary part of forming a healthy identity, and therefore see foreclosure as unhealthy. We will discuss this issue shortly.

Finally, the classification that combines exploration and commitment is **identity achievement**. Identity achievement is the classification for young people who have made definite personal, occupational, and ideological choices. By definition, identity achievement is preceded by a period of identity moratorium in which exploration takes place. If commitment takes place without exploration, it is considered identity foreclosure rather than identity achievement.

Two findings stand out from the many studies that have been conducted using the identity status model. One is that adolescents’ identity status tends to be related to other aspects of their development (Kroger, 2003, 2007; Schwartz & Pantin, 2006). The identity achievement and moratorium statuses are notably related to a variety of favorable aspects

**TABLE 6.2 The Four Identity Statuses**

		Commitment	
		Yes	No
Exploration	Yes	Achievement	Moratorium
	No	Foreclosure	Diffusion

**identity status model** An approach to conceptualizing and researching identity development that classifies people into one of four identity categories: foreclosure, diffusion, moratorium, or achievement.

**identity crisis** Erikson’s term for the intense period of struggle that adolescents may experience in the course of forming an identity.

**identity diffusion** An identity status that combines no exploration with no commitment. No commitments have been made among the available paths of identity formation, and the person is not seriously attempting to sort through potential choices and make enduring commitments.

**identity moratorium** An identity status that involves exploration but no commitment, in which young people are trying out different personal, occupational, and ideological possibilities.

**identity foreclosure** An identity status in which young people have not experimented with a range of possibilities but have nevertheless committed themselves to certain choices—commitment, but no exploration.

**identity achievement** The identity status of young people who have made definite personal, occupational, and ideological choices following a period of exploring possible alternatives.

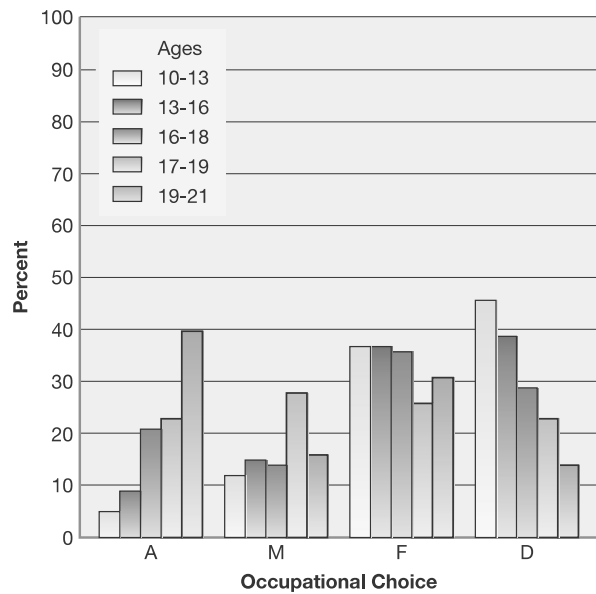


of development. Adolescents in these categories of identity development are more likely than adolescents in the foreclosure or diffusion categories to be self-directed, cooperative, and good at problem solving. Adolescents in the achievement category are rated more favorably in some respects than adolescents in the moratorium category. As you might expect, moratorium adolescents are more likely than achievement adolescents to be indecisive and unsure of their opinions.

In contrast, adolescents in the diffusion and foreclosure categories of identity development tend to have less favorable development in other areas as well (Abu-Rayya, 2006; Kroger, 2003; Waterman, 2007). Diffusion is considered to be the least favorable of the identity statuses and is viewed as predictive of later psychological problems. Compared with adolescents in the achievement or moratorium statuses, adolescents in the diffusion status are lower in self-esteem and self-control. Diffusion status is also related to high anxiety, apathy, and disconnected relationships with parents.

The foreclosure status is more complex in its relation to other aspects of development (Hardy et al., 2011; Meeus, 2011). Adolescents in the foreclosure status tend to be higher on conformity, conventionality, and obedience to authority than adolescents in the other statuses (Kroger, 2003). These are generally considered negative outcomes by researchers from Western majority cultures, although they are virtues in many non-Western cultures (Heine et al., 1999; Shweder et al., 2006). Also, adolescents with the foreclosure status tend to have especially close relationships with their parents, which may lead them to accept their parents' values and guidance without going through a period of exploration as adolescents with the achievement status have done (Phinney, 2000). Again, this is sometimes portrayed as negative by psychologists who believe it is necessary to go through a period of exploration in order to develop a mature identity, but this view rests partly on values that favor individualism and independent thinking.

The other prominent finding in research on identity formation is that it takes longer to reach identity achievement than scholars had expected. In fact, for most young people this status is reached—if at all—in emerging adulthood or beyond rather than in adolescence. Studies that have compared adolescents from ages 12 through 18 have found that, although the proportion of adolescents in the diffusion category decreases with age and the proportion of adolescents in the identity achievement category increases with age, even by early emerging adulthood less than half are classified as having reached identity achievement (Kroger, et al., 2010; Meeus, 2011; van Hoof, 1999).



**FIGURE 6.3** Changes in identity status with age. The numbers indicate the percentage of people in each identity status category at each age. A = Achievement, M = Moratorium, F = Foreclosure, D = Diffusion. Source: Waterman (1999).

An example of this pattern, reported in an American study (Waterman, 1999), is shown in **Figure 6.3**. Similar findings were reported in a study of 12- to 27-year olds in the Netherlands (Meeus et al., 1999).

Studies of college students find that progress toward identity achievement also takes place during the college years, but mainly in the specific area of occupational identity rather than for identity more generally (Waterman, 1992). Some studies indicate that identity achievement may come faster for emerging adults who do not attend college, perhaps because in the college environment young people's ideas about themselves are challenged and they are encouraged to question previously held ideas (Schwartz et al., 2011). However, even for noncollege emerging adults, the majority have not reached identity achievement by age 21 (Kroger et al., 2010; Waterman, 1999).

Emerging adulthood is now regarded by many identity researchers as an especially important time for identity development (Coté, 2006; Schwartz & Pantin, 2006). Even 40 years ago, Erikson observed that it was taking longer and longer for young people in industrialized societies to achieve identity formation. He commented on the “prolonged adolescence” that was becoming increasingly common in such societies and how this was leading to a prolonged period of identity formation, “during which the young adult through

**postmodern identity** A conception of identity as complex and as highly variable across contexts and across time.

**intimacy versus isolation** Erikson's term for the central issue of young adulthood, in which persons face alternatives between committing themselves to another person in an intimate relationship or becoming isolated as a consequence of an inability to form an enduring intimate relationship.

free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society” (1968, p. 156). Considering the changes that have taken place since Erikson made this observation in the 1960s, including much higher ages of marriage and parenthood and longer education, Erikson’s observation applies to far more young people today than it did then (Coté, 2000, 2006). Indeed, the conception of emerging adulthood as a distinct period of life is based to a considerable extent on the fact that, over recent decades, the late teens and early 20s have become a period of “free role experimentation” for an increasing proportion of young people (Arnett, 2000a, 2004a, 2007a). The achievement of an adult identity comes later, compared with earlier generations, as many emerging adults use the years of their late teens and early 20s for identity explorations in love, work, and ideology.

### Critiques and Elaborations of Identity Theory and Research

Erikson’s theory has dominated identity theory and research for over half a century, and like any long-standing theory it has been critiqued and modified over time. Three of the most prominent critiques have been a critique of the identity status model, a gender critique, and a cultural critique. Two important elaborations of identity theory and research have been the study of ethnic identity among minority groups and the analysis of how globalization influences identity development. The following sections explore each of these topics.

**The Identity Status Model: A Postmodern Perspective** In recent years, the identity status model has come under increasing criticism from scholars who view it as a narrow and outdated model of identity formation (Coté, 2000; Schwartz, 2005; van Hoof & Raaijmakers, 2003). According to these critics, identity is not nearly as stable and unitary as the identity status model portrays it, nor does identity development proceed through a predictable set of stages that culminate in identity achievement some time in late adolescence or emerging adulthood. On the contrary, in this view, the most common form of identity today is the **postmodern identity**, which is composed of diverse elements that do not always form a unified, consistent self (Schacter, 2005a, 2005b).

The postmodern identity changes across contexts, so that people may show a different identity to friends, family, coworkers, and others. It also changes continuously, not just in adolescence and emerging adulthood but throughout the life course, as people add new elements to their identities and discard others. As noted in Chapter 1, a similar theme has been sounded by globalization theorists, who have argued that young people around the world increasingly develop a complex identity that combines elements from their culture and the global media culture and that changes as these cultures change (Arnett, 2002a; Giddens, 2000; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). The identity status model continues to dominate research on identity development in adolescence and emerging adulthood, but the postmodern critique may lead to new methods that will expand our understanding of identity issues.

### applying your knowledge

Which better fits your own sense of identity, the identity status model or the postmodern identity theory? How would you devise a study to test the claims of the postmodern identity theorists?

**Gender and Identity** Another critique of identity theory and research concerns the role of gender. Erikson has been the subject of theoretical critiques for being biased toward male development (Gilligan, 1982; Montgomery, 2005). Erikson believed that to some extent “anatomy is destiny,” meaning that there are sex differences in psychological development, including identity development, that are based on biological sex differences (Erikson, 1950, 1968). Specifically, he believed that women’s biology, represented by the “inner space” of the uterus and the capacity for bearing children, makes them oriented toward relationships with others, whereas men’s biology, represented by the penis, makes them oriented toward independent, instrumental activity. With regard to adolescence, in Erikson’s theory forming an identity means becoming separate and independent from others. Consequently, according to Carol Gilligan (1982) and others, Erikson presents the male goal of striving for an independent identity in adolescence as the healthy standard for normal development. In contrast, adolescent girls’ emphasis on relationships with others is a less desirable deviation from normal development (Archer, 1992; Sorell & Montgomery, 2001).

Until recently, studies often found gender differences in identity development, especially in relation to occupational exploration (Kroger, 2007; Waterman, 1992). That is, some evidence suggested that females were more willing than males to constrain their occupational exploration to maintain their relationships (Archer, 1989; Cooper & Grotevant, 1987; Marcia, 1993; Patterson et al., 1992). That is, some females seemed to be less willing than males to take advantage of an educational or occupational opportunity that would require them to move a great distance because that would mean leaving their parents, their friends, and perhaps their romantic partner.

In Erikson’s theory, this means that intimacy was often a higher priority than identity for females, whereas for males identity tended to come before intimacy (Gilligan, 1982; Lytle et al., 1997; Miller, 1991; Scheidel & Marcia, 1985; Surrey, 1991). According to Erikson, **intimacy versus isolation** is the central issue of young adulthood. Establishing intimacy means uniting your newly formed identity with another person in an intimate relationship. The alternative is isolation, characterized by an inability to form an enduring intimate relationship. Research on the relation between identity and intimacy has often focused on gender differences. Most studies until about a decade ago indicated that developmental processes of forming an identity and establishing intimacy took place simultaneously for females, whereas males tended to achieve identity before intimacy (Lytle et al., 1997; Miller, 1991; Surrey, 1991).

However, the most recent studies have found no gender differences in identity and intimacy patterns. This finding



Intimacy issues may arise alongside identity issues for some young women.

has been reported on samples in the United States (Montgomery, 2005), the Netherlands (Meeus & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010), Australia (Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006), and Israel (Seginer & Noyman, 2005). The change may be due to increasing gender equality in Western countries, as noted in Chapter 5.

**Culture and Identity** Erik Erikson's cultural background was diverse—he was the son of Danish parents, raised in Germany, and spent most of his adult life in the United States—and he was acutely aware of the relation between culture and identity formation. He spent time as an ethnographer among the Sioux and Yurok tribes of Native Americans, and he devoted a chapter in *Childhood and Society* (1950) to adolescent identity development in these tribes. Nevertheless, virtually all of the research inspired by Erikson's theory has taken place among White middle-class adolescents in the United States. What can we say about identity development among adolescents in other cultures?

One observation that can be made is that, although Erikson sought to ground his theory in historical and cultural context, his discussion of identity development nevertheless assumes an independent self that is allowed to make free choices in love, work, and ideology. The focus of Erikson's identity theory is on how young people develop an understanding of themselves as unique individuals. However, as we have discussed, this conception of the self is distinctively Western and is historically recent (Baumeister, 1987; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder et al., 2006; Sorell & Montgomery, 2001). In most cultures until recently, the self has been understood as interdependent, defined in relation to others, rather than as independent. Even today, Erikson's assertions

of the prominence of identity issues in adolescence may apply more to modern Western adolescents than to adolescents in other cultures.

A related cultural observation is that the psychosocial moratorium, the period of exploration that Erikson viewed as a standard part of identity formation, is considerably more possible in some cultures than others (Arnett, 2006a; Sorell & Montgomery, 2001). In today's industrialized societies, there are few pressures on young people to become economic contributors in childhood or adolescence. Young people in these societies are generally allowed a long psychological moratorium in adolescence and emerging adulthood to try out various possible life choices in love, work, and ideology. However, the experience of adolescence is often much different in traditional cultures. Explorations in love are clearly limited or even nonexistent in cultures where dating is not allowed and marriages are either arranged by parents or strongly influenced by them. Explorations in work are limited in cultures where the economy is simple and offers only a limited range of choices.

Limitations on exploration in both love and work are narrower for girls in traditional cultures than for boys. With regard to love, as noted in Chapter 5, some degree of sexual experimentation is encouraged for adolescent boys in most cultures, but for girls sexual experimentation is more likely to be restricted or forbidden. With regard to work, in most traditional cultures today and for most of human history in every culture, adolescent girls have been designated by their cultures for the roles of wife and mother, and these were essentially the only choices open to them.

In terms of ideology, too, a psychosocial moratorium has been the exception in human cultures rather than the standard. In most cultures, young people have been expected to grow up to believe what adults teach them to believe, without questioning it. It is only in recent history, and mainly in industrialized Western countries, that these expectations have changed and that it has come to be seen as desirable for adolescents and emerging adults to think for themselves, decide



Identity explorations are often limited in traditional cultures, especially for girls. Here, girls in Zambia cultivate a field.

on their own beliefs, and make their life choices independently (Arnett, 1998a; Bellah et al., 1985).

For modern young people in the West, then, identity development is a longer and more complex process than in the past and compared with traditional cultures. As we will see later in this chapter, this is increasingly true for the rest of the world as well, as industrialization increases worldwide and as Western values of individualism influence traditional cultures through globalization (Schlegel & Hewlett, 2010).

## Ethnic Identity

In discussing identity, we have noted that in Erikson's theory the three key areas of identity formation are love, work, and ideology. For a large and growing proportion of adolescents in industrialized societies, one aspect of ideology is beliefs about what it means to be a member of an ethnic minority within a society dominated by the majority culture. Scholarly attention to this topic has increased in recent years as immigration from developing countries to industrialized societies has grown and as scholars have begun to devote greater attention to cultural issues in development (Berry, 2010).

Like other identity issues, issues of ethnic identity come to the forefront in adolescence because of the cognitive capacities that adolescents develop (Pahl & Way, 2006; Portes, Dunham, & Castillo, 2000). One aspect of the growing capacity for self-reflection among adolescents who belong to ethnic minorities is likely to be a sharpened awareness of what it means for them to be a member of their minority group. Group terms such as *African American*, *Chinese Canadian*, and *Turkish Dutch* take on a new meaning as adolescents can now think about what these terms mean and how the term for their ethnic group applies to themselves. Also, as a consequence of their growing capacity to think about what others think about them, adolescents become more acutely aware of the prejudices and stereotypes that others may hold about their ethnic group.



Adolescents with a bicultural ethnic identity are able to alternate their identities depending on the group they are with.

Because adolescents and emerging adults who are members of ethnic minorities have to confront such issues, identity development is likely to be more complex for them than for those who belong to the majority culture (Phinney, 2000, 2006). Consider, for example, identity development in the area of love. Love—along with dating and sex—is an area where cultural conflicts are especially likely to arise for adolescents who are members of ethnic minorities. Part of identity development in Western majority cultures means trying out different possibilities in love by forming emotionally intimate relationships with different people and gaining sexual experience. However, this model is in sharp conflict with the values of many ethnic minority groups. In most Asian American groups, for example, recreational dating is disapproved and sexual experimentation before marriage is considered disgraceful—especially for females (Qin, 2009; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000; Wong, 1997). Similarly, among Latinos, gaining sexual experience in adolescence is considered wrong for girls, and they are often highly restricted by their parents and their brothers to prevent any violation of this norm (O'Sullivan & Hearn, 2008). Young people in these ethnic groups face a challenge in reconciling the values of their ethnic group on such issues with the values of the majority culture, to which they are inevitably exposed through school, the media, and peers (Qin, 2009; Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992).

How, then, does identity development take place for young people who are members of minority groups within Western societies? To what extent do they develop an identity that reflects the values of the majority culture, and to what extent do they retain the values of their minority group? One scholar who has done extensive work on these questions among American minorities is Jean Phinney (1990, 2000, 2006; Phinney & Alipuria, 1987; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997; Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992). On the basis of her research, Phinney has concluded that adolescents who are members of minority groups have four different ways of responding to their awareness of their ethnicity (Table 6.3).

TABLE 6.3 Four Possible Ethnic Identity Statuses

		Identification With Ethnic Group	
		High	Low
Identification with Majority Culture	High	Bicultural	Assimilated
	Low	Separated	Marginal
<i>Examples</i>			
Assimilation: "I don't really think of myself as Asian American, just as American."			
Separation: "I am not part of two cultures. I am just Black."			
Marginality: "When I'm with my Indian friends, I feel White, and when I'm with my White friends, I feel Indian. I don't really feel like I belong with either of them."			
Biculturalism: "Being both Mexican and American means having the best of both worlds. You have different strengths you can draw from in different situations."			
Source: Based on Phinney & Devich-Navarro (1997).			

**Assimilation** is the option that involves leaving behind the ways of one's ethnic group and adopting the values and way of life of the majority culture. This is the path that is reflected in the idea of American society as a "melting pot" that blends people of diverse origins into one national culture. **Marginality** involves rejecting one's culture of origin but also feeling rejected by the majority culture. Some adolescents feel little identification with the culture of their parents and grandparents, nor do they feel accepted and integrated into American society. **Separation** is the approach that involves associating only with members of one's own ethnic group and rejecting the ways of the majority culture. **Biculturalism** involves developing a dual identity, one based in the ethnic group of origin and one based in the majority culture. Being bicultural means moving back and forth between the ethnic culture and the majority culture, and alternating identities as appropriate.

Which of these ethnic identity statuses is most common among minority adolescents? The bicultural status is the most common status among Mexican Americans and Asian Americans, as well as among some European minority groups such as Turkish adolescents in the Netherlands and Pakistani adolescents in Great Britain (Hutnik & Street, 2010; Marks et al., 2011; Verkuyten, 2002). However, separation is the most common ethnic identity status among African American adolescents, and marginality is pervasive among Native American adolescents (see the Cultural Focus box). Of course, each ethnic group is diverse and contains adolescents with a variety of different ethnic identity statuses.

Adolescents tend to be more aware of their ethnic identity when they are in the minority. For example, in one study, Latino adolescents attending a predominantly non-Latino school reported significantly higher levels of ethnic identity than adolescents in a predominantly Latino or a balanced Latino/non-Latino school (Umaña-Taylor, 2005). Recently, Phinney (2006, 2008) has proposed that emerging adulthood may be an especially important time for developing ethnic identity because emerging adults often enter new contexts (new schools, new jobs, perhaps new living situations) that may involve greater contact with people outside their ethnic group and thus sharpen their awareness of their ethnic identity.

Is a strong ethnic identity related to other aspects of development in adolescence and emerging adulthood? For the most part, having a well-defined ethnic identity appears to play a positive role in adolescents' lives (Hughes et al., 2009). Specifically, studies have found that having a strong sense of one's ethnicity is related to a variety of other favorable aspects of development, such as overall well-being, academic achievement, and lower rates of risk behavior

(Giang & Wittig, 2006; St. Louis & Liem, 2005; Yasui et al., 2005; Yip & Fuligni, 2002).

Some scholars have argued that, for African American adolescents in particular, cultivating pride in their ethnic identity is an important part of their identity formation, especially in a society where they are likely to experience discrimination because of the color of their skin (Street et al., 2009; Whaley & McQueen, 2010). However, other scholars have argued that promoting ethnic identity may lead adolescents to adopt a separation identity that cuts them off from the majority culture in a way that inhibits their personal growth (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992). These scholars express concern that some minority adolescents may come to define themselves in opposition to the majority culture—developing a negative identity, in Erikson's (1968) terms—in a way that may interfere with developing a positive identity of their own.

The separation response is, at least in part, a result of the discrimination and prejudice that minorities often face in American society and that young people become more fully aware of as they reach adolescence. Their awareness of discrimination may also increase with the length of time their family has been in the United States. An interesting finding in this research is that foreign-born adolescents tend to believe in the American ideal of equal opportunity more than minority adolescents whose families have been in the United States for a generation or more (Phinney, DuPont et al., 1994; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). This suggests that recent immigrants may expect that they or their children will become assimilated into the great American melting pot, but after a generation or two many of them come up against the realities of ethnic prejudice in American society, leading to more of a separation identity. African American adolescents tend to be more in favor of separation than adolescents from other ethnic groups, perhaps because most of them are from families who have been in the United States for many generations and who have experienced a long history of slavery, racism, and discrimination (Phinney, Devich-Navarro et al., 1994; Seaton et al., 2011).

## Identity and Globalization

One identity issue that has risen in prominence in recent years is how globalization influences identity, especially for adolescents and emerging adults. Two aspects of identity stand out as issues related to globalization (Arnett, 2002a). First, as noted in Chapter 1, because of globalization more young people around the world now develop a bicultural identity, with one part of their identity rooted in their local culture while another part stems from an awareness of

**assimilation** In the formation of an ethnic identity, the approach that involves leaving the ethnic culture behind and adopting the ways of the majority culture.

**marginality** In the formation of ethnic identity, the option that involves rejecting one's culture of origin but also feeling rejected by the majority culture.

**separation** In the formation of ethnic identity, the approach that involves associating only with members of one's own ethnic group and rejecting the ways of the majority culture.

**biculturalism** In the formation of ethnic identity, the approach that involves developing a dual identity, one based in the ethnic group of origin and one based in the majority culture.

**hybrid identity** An identity that integrates elements of various cultures.

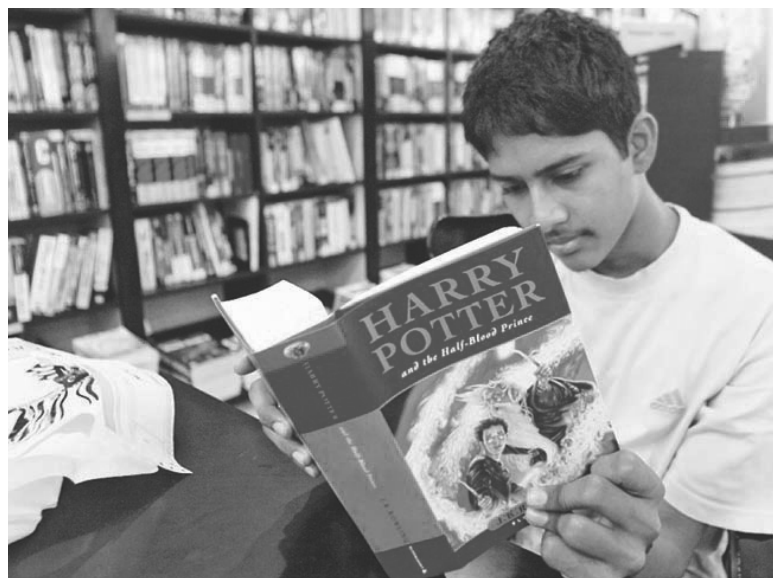
their relation to the global culture. For example, India has a growing, vigorous high-tech economic sector, led largely by young people. However, even the better-educated young people, who have become full-fledged members of the global economy, still mostly prefer to have an arranged marriage, in accordance with Indian tradition (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2012). They also generally expect to care for their parents in old age, again in accordance with Indian tradition. Thus they have one identity for participating in the global economy and succeeding in the fast-paced world of high technology, and another identity, rooted in Indian tradition, that they maintain with respect to their families and their personal lives.

Although developing a bicultural identity means retaining a local identity alongside a global identity, there is no doubt that many cultures are being modified by globalization, specifically by the introduction of global media, free market economics, democratic institutions, increased length of formal schooling, and delayed entry into marriage and parenthood (Jensen, 2008; Larson et al., 2010). These changes often alter traditional cultural practices and beliefs, and may lead less to a bicultural identity than to a **hybrid identity**, integrating local culture with elements of the global culture (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Hermans & Kempen, 1998).

Increasing immigration is one of the forces promoting globalization (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Jensen, 2008), and identities become even more complicated for young people who are immigrants. They may develop identities that combine their native culture, the local culture to which they have immigrated, and the global culture, along with various hybrids, leading to a multicultural identity or a complex hybrid identity. Furthermore, people living in a culture to which immigrants have come may incorporate aspects of the immigrants' culture into their own identities. Thus for an increasing number of the world's young people, as Hermans and Kempen (1998) observe, "Different and contrasting cultures can be part of a repertoire of collective voices playing their part in a multivoiced self" (p. 118).

A second identity-related consequence of globalization is that it seems to be leading to an increase in identity confusion—a marginalized identity, in Phinney's scheme—among young people in traditional cultures. As local cultures change in response to globalization, most young people manage to adapt to the changes and develop a bicultural or hybrid identity that provides the basis for living in their local culture and also participating in the global culture. For some young people, however, adapting to the rapid changes taking place in their cultures is more difficult. The images, values, and opportunities they perceive as being part of the global culture undermine their belief in the value of local cultural practices. At the same time, the ways of the global culture seem out of reach to them, too foreign to everything they know from their direct experience. Rather than becoming bicultural, they may experience themselves as marginalized, excluded from both their local culture and the global culture, truly belonging to neither.

Identity confusion among young people may be reflected in problems such as depression, suicide, and substance use. A variety of cultures have experienced a sharp increase in



Young people in traditional cultures may develop a bicultural or hybrid identity in response to globalization. Here, a young man in India reads *Harry Potter*.

suicide and substance use among their young people since their rapid move toward joining the global culture (Arnett, 2002a; Chenhall & Senior, 2009). This increase in these problems seems to indicate the difficulty that some young people in traditional cultures experience in forming a stable identity in the context of the rapid social changes caused by globalization. Whether this means that young people in traditional cultures are more likely than young people in the West to experience identity confusion remains to be studied.

## WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

1. Which identity status is associated with the worst outcomes in adolescence?
2. Why does Erikson's theory have limited applications in more collectivistic cultures?
3. What are some reasons an ethnic minority might develop a separation orientation?
4. How does globalization contribute to identity confusion?

## The Self, Alone

### 6.12 Summarize adolescents' emotional states during times they are alone.

One of the reasons that adolescents are able to engage in the frequent self-reflection that allows them to consider their self-conceptions, self-esteem, emotional states, and identity is that they are often by themselves. Studies of time use among American adolescents indicate that they spend about one fourth of their time alone, which is more time than they spend with either their families or their friends (Barnes et al., 2007; Larson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Graef, 1982; Larson & Richards, 1994).

## CULTURAL focus The Native American Self



Native American young people exhibit greater difficulties in many respects than any other American minority group (Goldston et al., 2008; Markstrom, 2008). They have the highest prevalence rates for use of alcohol, cigarettes, and illicit drugs (Friese et al., 2011; O'Connell et al., 2007). They have the highest school dropout rate and the highest teenage pregnancy rate (Garwick et al., 2008; Palacios & Kennedy, 2010). Especially alarming is the suicide rate among Native American young people aged 15 to 24, which is three times the rate for Whites (Goldston et al., 2008). Suicide is the leading cause of death among young Native Americans. Native Canadians (also known as First Nations peoples) are similar to Native Americans in their levels of substance use, school dropout, teenage pregnancy, and suicide (Chandler et al., 2004).

To a large extent, scholars view the difficulties of Native American young people as rooted in problems of the self (Katz, 1995; Lefley, 1976; Markstrom, 2008). The self-esteem of Native American adolescents tends to be substantially lower than that of other ethnic groups (Whitesell et al., 2009). Young Native Americans have also been found to have problems forming an identity in adolescence and emerging adulthood, as they attempt to reconcile the socialization of their Native American cultures with the influences and demands of the dominant White majority culture (Markstrom, 2011).

The explanation for problems of the self among young Native Americans is partly historical and partly contemporary. In historical terms, during the 19th century Native American cultures were decimated and finally overcome by the spread of European American settlement into the vast areas of the United States that

Native American tribes once dominated (Tveskov, 2008). The devastation of their cultures was deep and thorough, as they were betrayed repeatedly by the U.S. government, killed in large numbers, forced to leave their homelands, and ultimately herded onto reservations in the most desolate parts of the country. This alone would be enough to explain substantial disruption to their cultural life to the present day, with consequent effects on the socialization and development of their young people.

In the 20th century, additional government practices added to and prolonged the cultural destruction suffered by Native Americans. For most of the century, Native American children were forced to attend schools run not by the adults of their community but by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), a federal agency. The goal of these schools was complete assimilation of Native American children and adolescents into the ways of the majority culture—and, correspondingly, the annihilation of their attachment to their own culture's beliefs, values, knowledge, and customs (Unger, 1977). Often, these were boarding schools where the children lived during the school year, completely isolated from their families and communities.

Given these conditions, and given that constructing the self requires a cultural foundation (Shweder et al., 2006), many Native American young people found it difficult to construct a stable and coherent self. These educational practices finally changed in the 1970s, when federal legislation was passed giving Native Americans substantial control over their schools (John, 1998). Still, like the effects of losing their lands and being forced to

The ESM studies provide some interesting data on adolescents' experiences of being alone (Greasley & Lamont, 2011; Larson et al., 1982; Larson & Richards, 1994). These studies find that a substantial proportion of adolescents' time alone is spent in their bedrooms, with the door closed. Is this a lonely time for them? Yes, but it also has benefits. During their time alone their moods tend to be low—they are more likely than at other times to report feeling weak, lonely, and sad. However, after a period by themselves their mood tends to rise. Larson and Richards (1994) conclude that adolescents use their time alone for self-reflection and mood management. They listen to music, they lie on their beds, they groom themselves in the mirror, they brood, they text their friends, they fantasize (Greasley & Lamont, 2011). When their time alone is done, they tend to feel restored, ready to face the slings and arrows of daily life again.

Larson and Richards (1994) provide a revealing example of one adolescent girl's experience of being alone. She was alone about one fourth of the times she was beeped, the



Adolescents spend more time by themselves than with family or friends.

**social loneliness** Condition that occurs when people feel that they lack a sufficient number of social contacts and relationships.

**emotional loneliness** Condition that occurs when people feel that the relationships they have lack sufficient closeness and intimacy.

enter reservations a century ago, the damage from the cultural annihilation practices of the schools has endured in Native American cultures.

Today, threats to the selves of Native American young people remain from the historical legacy of cultural destruction and from the bleak conditions they face as they look ahead to adulthood. The legacy of cultural destruction makes it difficult for them to form a bicultural identity; Native American cultures and the American majority culture are not easily combined because for many young Native Americans accepting White society even as part of a bicultural identity would amount to betraying their own people in light of the suffering they have endured at the hands of Whites (Markstrom, 2011). At the same time, government practices undermining Native American cultural socialization over the 20th century were effective, so that many young people no longer share their culture's traditional beliefs or know much about their culture's traditional way of life. As Deyhle (1998) observes, "On the one hand, due to the racism against [Native Americans] in the Anglo community and youth's insistence on cultural integrity, the Anglo world is not available to them. On the other hand, the traditional lives of their ancestors no longer exist" (p. 6).

Thus, many young Native Americans find themselves with a marginal ethnic identity status, alienated from both the majority culture and their own culture, living between two worlds and at home in neither. Conditions in their communities are grim; rates of poverty and unemployment among Native Americans are exceptionally high (Carlo et al., 2011), but the predominantly White majority culture does not accept them and is not accepted by them. Their high rates of substance use, school leaving,



The self-development of young Native Americans is often fraught with difficulties.

teenage pregnancy, and suicide reflect their difficulties in constructing a self under these conditions. Although some recent hopeful signs have been seen—for example, in rising rates of college enrollment—overall, young Native Americans' prospects remain formidably bleak.

typical rate. Often, she reported feeling lonely during her times alone. She lamented her looks, she brooded over how all the girls except herself seemed to have a boyfriend. Yet, she wrote, "I like to be by myself. I don't have to be worried or aggravated by my parents. I have noticed that when I'm alone I feel better sometimes." Then she added, in large print, "*!NOT ALWAYS!*," reflecting her ambivalence (Larson & Richards, 1994, p. 102).

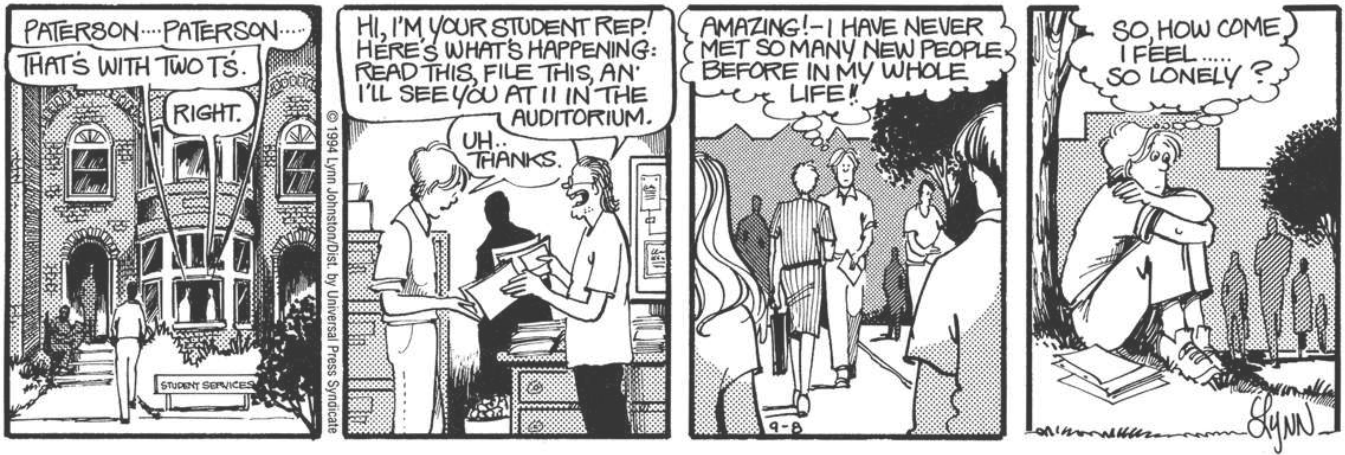
Being alone can be constructive, then, as long as an adolescent does not have too much of it. Studies have found that adolescents who spend an unusually high proportion of their time alone tend to have higher rates of school problems, depression, and other psychological difficulties (Barnes et al., 2007; Larson & Richards, 1994; Schneiders et al., 2007). However, the same studies have found that adolescents who are rarely alone also have higher rates of school problems and depression. A moderate amount of time alone can be healthy for adolescents because, as Larson and Richards (1994) observe, "After a long day in which their emotions are played upon by peers, teachers, and family members, a measured period

of time by themselves, to reflect, regroup, and explore, may be just what they need" (p. 103).

Just as being alone does not necessarily mean being lonely, a person can be lonely even when among others. Robert Weiss (1973) made an important and influential distinction between two types of loneliness: social loneliness and emotional loneliness. **Social loneliness** occurs when people feel that they lack a sufficient number of social contacts and relationships. In contrast, **emotional loneliness** occurs when people feel that the relationships they have lack sufficient closeness and intimacy. Thus, social loneliness reflects a deficit in the *quantity* of social contacts and relationships, whereas emotional loneliness reflects a deficit in the emotional *quality* of a person's relationships. Young people may experience either or both of these types of loneliness in their teens and early 20s (Fontaine et al., 2009).

Emerging adulthood is a period when time alone is especially high (Incavou, 2002). According to time use studies across the life span, young people ages 19 to 29 spend more of their leisure time alone than any persons except the elderly, and more of their time in productive activities





Emotional loneliness is common in the first year of college, even though college students are often around other people.

(school and work) alone than any other age group under 40 (Larson, 1990). Emerging adults have also been found to report greater feelings of loneliness than either adolescents or adults (Rokach, 2000), and there are good reasons why these years would be lonelier. In many Western countries, most emerging adults move out of the home by age 18 or 19, to go to college or just to live independently (Douglass, 2007). This move may have many advantages, such as giving emerging adults more independence and requiring them to take on more responsibility for their daily lives, but it also means that they are no longer wrapped in the relative security of the family environment. They may be glad to be on their own in many ways, but nevertheless they may find themselves to be lonely more often than when they had lived at home (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1997). Most young people in developed countries do not enter marriage—and the emotional support and companionship that usually go along with it—until their mid- to late 20s (Arnett, 2006a; Douglass, 2007). For many young people, emerging adulthood is a period between the companionship of living with family and the companionship of marriage or some other long-term partnership (Arnett, 2000a, 2005b). In recent years, texting, emailing, and using social-networking sites such as Facebook have become common ways for emerging adults to maintain social connections and support, as we will see in Chapter 12 (Lenhart et al., 2010).

In the college environment, emerging adults rarely experience social loneliness but emotional loneliness is common (Eshbaugh, 2010). The first year of college has been found to be an especially lonely period for emerging adults, even though they are meeting many new people (Wiseman, Mayselless, & Sharabany, 2010). A college freshman living in a dormitory may have people around virtually every moment of the day—while sleeping, eating, studying, working, and

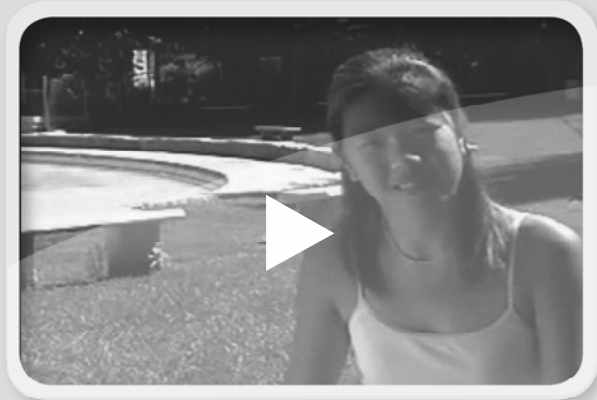
going to class—but still feel lonely if those social contacts are not emotionally rewarding.

### WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

1. In what ways does being alone promote self-development in adolescence?
2. Which type of loneliness is most common in the college environment?

### VIDEO GUIDE: Ethnic Identity

1. What are Phinney's categories of Ethnic Identity?
2. Which of Phinney's categories of Ethnic Identity would best fit the Asian American girl in this video? Why?
3. Describe an example of a person who would best fit the Bicultural category of Phinney's categories of Ethnic Identity.



### thinking critically

Compared with young people in Western cultures, do you think young people in traditional cultures would be more or less likely to experience loneliness?

## SUMMING UP

In this chapter we have addressed a variety of aspects of the self in adolescence and emerging adulthood, including self-conceptions, self-esteem, the emotional self, identity, and being alone. The main points of the chapter are as follows:

- Cultures differ greatly in their views of the self, with some promoting an independent self that is high in self-esteem and others promoting an interdependent self that is defined by relations with others.
- Self-conceptions become more abstract in adolescence. This includes the development of the capacity to distinguish between an actual self and two types of possible selves, an ideal self and a feared self. Self-conceptions in adolescence also become more complex, with an increased awareness that different aspects of the self might be shown to different people and in different situations. This includes an awareness that one may show a false self to others at times.
- Research indicates that self-esteem tends to decline in early adolescence and rise through late adolescence and emerging adulthood. Self-esteem does not decline among all adolescents, but is more likely to decline for girls than for boys and more likely to decline among Whites than among African Americans. The most influential aspects of self-esteem in adolescence are physical appearance and peer acceptance.
- The ESM studies show that adolescents tend to experience more extremes of emotions, especially negative ones such as feeling embarrassed or awkward, compared with preadolescents or adults. Carol Gilligan has argued that gender differences exist in emotional self-development during adolescence, as girls “lose their voice” in the course of conforming to cultural pressures for the female role, rather than asserting their authentic selves. However, research has provided limited support for this claim.
- According to Erik Erikson, the key issue in adolescent development is identity versus identity confusion, and the three principal areas of identity formation are love, work, and ideology. The identity status model has guided most research in this area by classifying adolescents into one of four statuses: foreclosure, diffusion, moratorium, and achievement. For young people in Western societies, identity formation usually involves a psychosocial moratorium (a period of exploration of various life possibilities) that continues through emerging adulthood.
- Adolescents who are members of ethnic minorities face the challenge of developing an ethnic identity in addition to an identity in the areas of love, work, and ideology. Four possible alternatives of ethnic identity formation are assimilation, marginality, separation, and biculturalism.
- Globalization is influencing identity issues in adolescence and emerging adulthood. Specifically, it is leading to the development of more bicultural and hybrid identities that combine elements of the local culture with elements of the global culture, and it appears to be leading to greater identity confusion among young people in some traditional cultures.
- The ESM studies find that adolescents are alone about one fourth of the time. Although their moods tend to be low during these hours, they often use these times for reflection and regeneration. Emotional loneliness tends to be high among college freshmen.

Studies of the self in adolescence and emerging adulthood are especially common in American society. Because of the American tradition of individualism, issues of the self have been of more interest and concern to Americans than to people in other societies, and this is reflected in the interests of American scholars. The distinction between the independent self and the interdependent self is an important one, but so far this idea has not been applied much to research on adolescence and emerging adulthood.

## KEY TERMS

actual self	151	internal consistency	155	identity achievement	163
possible selves	151	psychohistory	160	postmodern identity	165
ideal self	151	identity	160	intimacy versus isolation	165
feared self	151	identity versus identity confusion	161	assimilation	168
false self	152	identifications	162	marginality	168
self-esteem	152	psychosocial moratorium	162	separation	168
self-image	152	negative identity	162	biculturalism	168
self-concept	152	identity status model	163	hybrid identity	169
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baseline self-esteem	153	identity diffusion	163	emotional loneliness	171
barometric self-esteem	153	identity moratorium	163		
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