



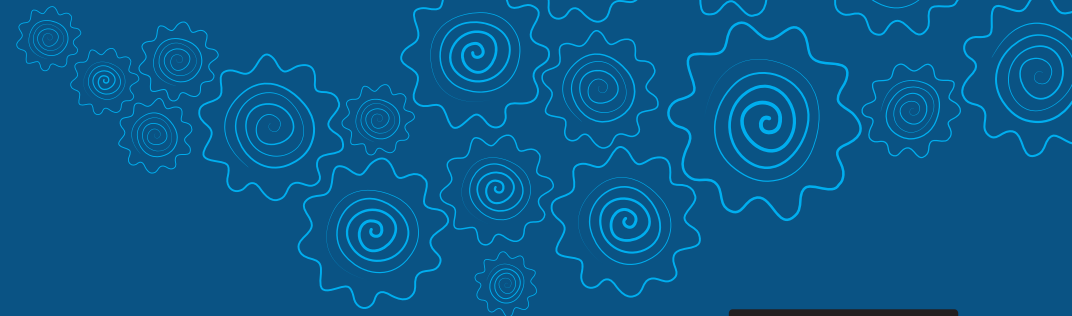
DEVELOPING INTO EARLY ADULTHOOD

Py Liv Eriksson

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## The Role of Identity and Personality

*Py Liv Eriksson*



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UNIVERSITY OF  
GOTHENBURG

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## The Role of Identity and Personality

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Py Liv Eriksson

Doctoral Dissertation in Psychology  
Department of Psychology  
University of Gothenburg  
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# Abstract

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The overall aim of this thesis was to investigate the development into early adulthood, focusing on identity and personality. The aim of **Study I** was to explore the developmental course and implications of the two meta-traits ego resiliency (i.e., individuals' capacity to adjust to their environment) and ego control (i.e., level of impulse restraint) from childhood (age 2) to early adulthood (age 33),  $N = 139$ . In general, the rank-order stability of proximal waves was consistently high for ego resiliency and ego control. Latent growth curve models showed that ego resiliency displayed high mean-level stability over time. Ego control demonstrated greater change in childhood relative to adolescence and adulthood. Analyses with intercepts and slopes of ego resiliency and ego control as predictors of adult well-being revealed associations with well-being, but these were generally accounted for by the Big Five traits. This study shows that ego resiliency and ego control are fairly stable personality constructs from childhood to adulthood, and highlights their association with adult adaptation. The aim of **Study II** was to investigate identity development across early adulthood (ages 25, 29, and 33,  $N=118$ ). Investigations of identity status revealed that fewer individuals were in the moratorium status (i.e., current exploration of identity) and more were in the identity achievement status (i.e., identity exploration before establishing commitments) in later years. At the individual level, stable identity statuses with established commitments were by far the most common patterns. Longitudinal qualitative analyses of identity interviews showed three processes of identity development within these stable patterns: *approach to change*, *story integration*, and *participation in a broader life context*. These results show how early adults maintain and evolve their identity within status stability. The aim of **Study III** was to use a cultural framework to understand how narratives of difficult experiences are told among early adults in Sweden (age 33,  $N = 116$ ), and then to examine the relations between these narrative patterns and well-being. Employing an open-exploratory approach, four equally prevalent emotional sequences were found: redemptive sequencing, neutral/vague sequencing, combination of positive and negative sequencing, and negative sequencing. While no differences were found in the use of the first three emotional sequences for well-being, the negative sequencing was associated with poorer well-being. These results show that there are several ways to narrate difficult experiences in the Swedish context. In conclusion, this thesis illuminates the important role of personality and identity – two central aspects of the understanding of the self – in people's psychological development and well-being.

*Keywords:* identity development, identity process, narrative identity, personality development, ego resiliency, ego control, early adulthood, cultural context



## Sammanfattning (Swedish Summary)

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Vem är du? Vilka egenskaper har du? Och hur blev du den du är? Dessa frågor handlar om vår identitet och vår personlighet, två centrala delar av självet och vilka vi är som personer. Identiteten är viktig eftersom den binder ihop vem man har varit med vem man är nu, och tankar kring vem man kommer att bli i framtiden. I takt med att nya utmaningar uppstår och livet förändras behöver vi därför upprätthålla en känsla av vilka vi är. Det är först under tonåren som identiteten blir en central utvecklingsaspekt och den fortsätter att vara viktig genom hela livet. Vad som är viktigt för identiteten kan handla om olika saker genom livet, i de tidiga vuxenåren kan frågor som rör identitet handla om att faktiskt genomföra tidigare beslut som gjorts och mål som man har inför vuxenlivet. Detta kan till exempel handla om att påbörja, eller fortsätta sin yrkesbana inom ett område som man tidigare valt. För identitetsutvecklingen i den här perioden av livet är det därför viktigt att upprätthålla en känsla av vem man är och samtidigt revidera tidigare beslut i enlighet med nya roller i vuxenlivet. När man har varit inom yrkeslivet en period kan det till exempel uppstå nya tankar och funderingar om hur man ser på den roll man har i sitt arbete, eller så behöver man till exempel utifrån rollen som förälder se över sina tidigare beslut om hur man vill prioritera mellan arbete och familj.

Det finns olika sätt att undersöka identitetsutveckling. Ett sätt att försöka förstå hur individer utvecklar och formar sin identitet är genom två identitetsprocesser: utforskande och ställningstagande. Utforskande handlar om att överväga olika alternativ inom viktiga områden i livet så som yrke, kärleksrelationer och föräldraskap. Ställningstagande handlar i sin tur om att ta beslut som rör viktiga identitetsområden. Tillsammans är utforskande och ställningstagande centrala för vilken identitetsstatus en individ har. En förvirrad identitetsstatus representeras av att varken ha utforskat, vara igång med ett aktivt utforskande, eller visa på tydliga ställningstaganden. En för tidig identitetsstatus innebär att man tagit ställning men inte utforskat innan sina ställningstaganden. Moratorium kallas den status då personer aktivt utforskar alternativa vägar och val tillhörande identiteten. Slutligen, en uppnådd identitet med en hög grad av utforskande och efterföljande ställningstagande representerar den identitetsutveckling som anses vara förknippad med flera olika positiva faktorer så som högre självkänsla och en känsla av att kunna påverka saker i livet. Även om det finns många studier som har undersökt identitetsutveckling under tonåren och de unga vuxenåren, så finns det tyvärr få studier som undersökt hur identiteten utvecklas i senare delar av livet, så som under de tidiga vuxenåren.

Identitetsutveckling kan även undersökas genom människors berättelser och det som kallas för narrativ identitet. Inom detta perspektiv ser man identiteten som en bok bestående av olika kapitel i form av viktiga erfarenheter som

vi är med om i livet. Några av dessa erfarenheter är de som är mer utmanade och svåra. Tidigare forskning har visat att hur människor integrerar berättelser kring svåra erfarenheter är viktigt för identitetsutveckling och för den psykiska hälsan. Hur människor skapar sina narrativ är också influerat av den kulturella kontext som de befinner sig i. I USA till exempel, där mycket av den narrativa forskningen har bedrivits, har man funnit att berättelser med ett försonande tema eller struktur, det vill säga då en svår händelse eller utmaning leder till något positivt, representerar ett dominerande narrativ. Detta dominerande narrativ har också visat sig vara positivt kopplat till välbefinnande. Det finns däremot lite forskning kring narrativ identitet och hur människor inom andra kulturer utanför USA berättar om svåra händelser i livet, samt hur dessa narrativa processer är kopplat till psykiskt välmående.

Personlighet, som ofta beskrivs som egenskaper i form av individers beteende, tankar och känslor, anses vara stabilare än identiteten men utvecklas också över tid. Personlighetsegenskaper som man kan se redan hos små barn, är egoresiliens och egokontroll. Egoresiliens handlar om individers förmåga att på ett flexibelt och anpassningsbart sätt kunna hantera nya miljöer och situationer. Egokontroll avser förmågan att hantera och kontrollera sina egna impulser. Låg egokontroll är förknippat med spontanitet och agerande i situationer utan eftertanke så som omedelbara känsloreaktioner. Hög egokontroll är i sin tur förknippat med att vara mer disciplinerad, visa mindre känslor och att ha mer svårigheter inför ovisshet. Även om personlighetsegenskaper kan urskiljas tidigt hos barn finns det lite forskning som har undersökt hur personlighetsegenskaper förändras över tid från barndom till vuxen ålder.

Identitet och personlighet är inte bara viktiga för att förstå vilka vi är och hur vi blev de personer vi är idag, utan de kan också påverka andra viktiga aspekter i livet så som psykologiskt välbefinnande. Denna avhandlings övergripande syfte är att undersöka hur identitet och personlighet, två centrala delar av självet, utvecklas över tid med fokus på de tidiga vuxenåren. De tre studier som är del av avhandlingen, bygger på intervjuer och enkätdata från deltagare i den longitudinella forskningsstudien GoLD (**G**othenburg **L**ongitudinal study of **D**evelopment) som har följt samma individer från barndom (1-2 år) till tidig vuxenålder (33-34 år).

I **Studie I** undersöktes personlighetsutveckling över tid från barndom (2 år) till tidig vuxenålder (33 år) samt vilken påverkan den här utvecklingen har för psykologiskt välbefinnande i tidig vuxenålder samt identitetsutveckling. 139 personer deltog i studien, varav 70 kvinnor och 69 män, och deras personlighet studerades vid nio tillfällen. De personlighetsegenskaper som undersöktes var egoresiliens och egokontroll. Resultaten i Studie I visade att på individnivå var det liten skillnad rörande hur egoresiliens och egokontroll förändrades mellan

närliggande åldrarna. Däremot visade studien att egoresiliens generellt minskade från barndom till vuxenålder, även om skillnaden var liten, och att personlighetsegenskapen egoresiliens fortfarande är relativt hög vid vuxenålder. Egokontroll ökade markant från barndom till och med tonåren för att sedan plana ut vid 21 års ålder och fortsätta på liknande nivåer fram till och med de tidiga vuxenåren. Vidare visade analyser av personlighetsutveckling för egoresiliens och egokontroll att det fanns ett samband med välbefinnande vid 33 års ålder. Men detta samband till psykiskt välbefinnande kunde i stort förklaras av andra personlighetsegenskaper så som extraversion, neuroticism, samvetsgrannhet, vänlighet och öppenhet.

I Studie I undersöktes också relationen mellan personlighet och identitetsutveckling i de tidiga vuxenåren. Resultaten visade att det fanns inget samband mellan personlighetsutveckling (för egoresiliens och egokontroll) och identitetsprocesser i form av utforskande och ställningstaganden inom viktiga områden i livet. Däremot visade resultaten att egoresiliens och egokontroll skattat av deltagarnas mammor då deltagarna var åtta respektive 15 år, var på olika sätt kopplat till identitetsutveckling (grad av ställningstagande och utforskande) inom flera identitetsområden vid 33 års ålder. Hög egoresiliens var kopplat till en högre grad av tidigare utforskande inom arbete, och prioriteringar mellan arbete och familj, samt högre grad av ställningstaganden inom arbete, romantiska relationer, och prioriteringar mellan arbete och familj. Hög egokontroll var i sin tur kopplat till mindre ställningstaganden inom global identitet, romantiska relationer, föräldraskap, och prioriteringar mellan arbete och familj. Dessa resultat indikerar att föräldrar (i det här fallet mammor) har en förmåga att uppfatta något i deras barns egoresiliens och egokontroll som i sin tur är kopplat till deras identitetsutveckling i vuxen ålder.

Sammantaget visar Studie I att personlighetsegenskaperna egoresiliens och egokontroll är delar av personligheten som är relativt stabila över tid och som kan påverka andra faktorer kopplade till vilka vi är och hur vi mår i vuxen ålder. Resultaten indikerar därför att egoresiliens och egokontroll, som kan urskiljas redan från tidig ålder, är värdefulla för att förstå våra personlighetsegenskaper. Vidare visar resultaten också att andra personlighetsegenskaper kopplade till egoresiliens och egokontroll så som extraversion, neuroticism, samvetsgrannhet, vänlighet och öppenhet är viktiga faktorer att ta i beaktande för att förstå relationen mellan personlighet och välbefinnande i vuxen ålder.

I **Studie II** undersöktes identitetsutveckling i de tidiga vuxenåren. Först undersöktes förändring i identitetsstatus över tid från 25, 29 och 33 års ålder (118 personer, 59 kvinnor och 59 män). Resultaten visade att det var fler av deltagarna som kodades till en uppnådd identitet och färre av deltagarna som var i ett aktivt utforskande, moratorium, vid 33 års ålder jämfört med tidigare åldrar



som undersöktes. Deltagarnas individuella mönster av identitetstatusutveckling undersöktes också. Dessa resultat visade att det vanligaste mönstret var att behålla samma identitetstatus, uppnådd identitet eller för tidig identitet, vid 25, 29 och 33 år. För att undersöka processer bakom dessa stabila utvecklingsmönster från 29 till 33 år undersöktes identitetsutveckling med hjälp av deltagarnas egna berättelser.

Analyserna av deltagarnas egna berättelser om sin identitetsutveckling resulterade i en modell med tre processer som beskriver viktiga aspekter av identitetsutvecklingen i de tidiga vuxenåren. Modellen beskriver dessa tre processers utveckling för varje individ mellan två poler: en fördjupning eller försvagning av identiteten. Personer som uppvisade en fördjupning av identiteten hade en mer integrerad identitet, samtidigt som de var flexibla och fortsatte att utveckla sin identitet. De som uppvisade en försvagning av identiteten hade en mer rigid och sluten identitet som inte hade utvecklats över tid. Processerna handlade om: förhållningssätt till förändring (förmåga att kunna förändra och/eller utveckla tidigare ställningstaganden), utvecklande av integration av berättelsen (mer sammanhängande teman och/eller integration av tidsaspekter), samt att på ett nytt sätt engagera sig i en större livskontext (nytt sätt att se på sin roll eller personliga bidrag inom olika sammanhang i livet). Analyser av hur varje deltagare sammantaget utvecklades inom de tre processerna visade att individer med ett tidigare utforskande innan sina ställningstaganden ofta fortsatte att fördjupa sin identitet inom de tre processerna. Individer som inte utforskat innan sina ställningstaganden hade istället en identitetsutveckling som kunde bestå av en fördjupning eller ett försvagande av identiteten. Sammanfattningsvis visar Studie II att det finns tre viktiga identitetsutvecklingsprocesser i de tidiga vuxenåren. Studien visar därför att identitetsutveckling i de tidiga vuxenåren är en pågående process som innebär att personer behöver utveckla, förändra och justera sin identitet.

I **Studie III** användes ett narrativt identitetsperspektiv där fokus var hur personer i de tidiga vuxenåren inom den svenska kontexten berättar om svåra erfarenheter samt vilken betydelse dessa erfarenheter har för deras identitet och välmående (116 berättelser från 58 kvinnor och 58 män). Resultaten i studien visade att det fanns fyra emotionella strukturer som var lika vanligt förekommande: försoningsstruktur (en svår händelse eller utmaning som leder till något positivt), neutral/vag struktur (narrativ som avslutas med en neutral, eller mer vag emotionell ton), kombination av positiv och negativ struktur (narrativ där både en positiv och negativ emotionell ton används för rama in den svåra händelsen), samt negativ struktur (narrativ med ett negativt avslut i relation till erfarenheten). Alla emotionella strukturer var på liknande sätt positivt kopplade till välmående förutom negativ struktur som var kopplat till sämre välmående. Resultatet i Studie III visade även att det fanns både positiva och negativa

resonemang i narrativen om hur de svåra erfarenheterna påverkat identiteten. Det var framförallt berättelser med en negativ struktur som var kopplade till mer resonemang om hur händelsen påverkat identiteten negativt. Narrativ med försoningsstruktur och kombination av positiv och negativ struktur var i sin tur kopplade till mer resonemang kring hur händelsen påverkat identiteten på ett positivt sätt.

Allt som allt visar resultaten i Studie III att personer i tidiga vuxenåren i Sverige, använder flera olika sätt att strukturera sina narrativ om svåra händelser. Studien belyser också hur viktig den kulturella kontexten är för att förstå den narrativa identiteten och på vilket sätt narrativa processer är kopplade till välmående.

Sammantaget bidrar de tre studierna i avhandlingen till att visa på vilken roll som både personlighet och identitet har för den psykologiska utvecklingen under de tidiga vuxenåren. Studie I visar att personlighetsutveckling tidigt i livet hänger ihop med utveckling och välmående i de tidiga vuxenåren. Studie II visar att identitetsutvecklingen i de tidiga vuxenåren handlar om att fortsätta utveckla och justera sina tidigare ställningstaganden även om det inte sker stora yttre förändringar i livet, att fortsätta utveckla sin berättelse om vem man är och hur man blev den person man är idag, samt att på ett nytt sätt engagera sig i en större livskontext. Studie III visar på värdet av att försöka förstå hur den kulturella kontexten kan påverka identiteten. Studien visar att det i Sverige finns många sätt att forma sina narrativ och visar på hur dessa sätt i sin tur är kopplade till välmående. Sammantaget demonstrerar avhandlingen att för att kunna fånga komplexiteten i utvecklingen av personlighet och identitet behövs olika angreppssätt som tillsammans kan bidra till en djupare förståelse.



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---

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Py Liv Eriksson, Gothenburg, November 2020



# LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

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This thesis is based on following three papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

- I. Syed, M., Eriksson, P. L., Friséén, A., Hwang, C. P., & Lamb, M. E. (2020). Personality development from age 2 to 33: Stability and change in ego resiliency and ego control and associations with adult adaptation. *Developmental Psychology*, *56*, 815-832. doi: 10.1037/dev0000895
- II. Eriksson, P. L., Wängqvist, M., Carlsson, J., & Friséén, A. (2020). Identity development in early adulthood. *Developmental Psychology*, *56*, 1968-1983. doi: 10.1037/dev0001093
- III. Eriksson, P. L., McLean, K. C., & Friséén, A. (2020). Ta det onda med det goda [accepting the bad that comes with the good] - A cultural framework for identity narratives of difficult experiences in Sweden. *Identity*, *20*, 157-169. doi:10.1080/15283488.2020.1781636



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# INTRODUCTION

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Who are you? And how did you become who you are? These are questions that can be answered in several ways, focusing on different aspects central to the understanding of the self and people's psychological development. Two central parts of the self that pertain to who people are as individuals are identity and personality. Personality emerges already in early childhood, and is evident in children's behavior and emotion regulation. Identity development, on the other hand, becomes a central task first during adolescence. As people develop into early adulthood, they will continue to develop their personalities and identities through developmental processes that will encompass important elements of both stability and change.

Personality is central for individuals' psychological development, as it influences their journey through life and is associated with important life outcomes such as psychological well-being (Anglim, Horwood, Smillie, Marrero, & Wood, 2020; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007; Specht, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2011). Already in early childhood, individual differences in personality can be found among children (Block, 2002; Caspi & Silva, 1995; Caspi, Roberts & Shiner, 2005; Shiner, 2015). Aspects of the personality that are prominent from early childhood are self-regulatory processes such as ego resiliency and ego control (Block 2002; Block & Block, 1980a, 2006). Ego resiliency reflects individuals' ability to adapt in new environments and to be flexible in different circumstances. Individuals with high ego resiliency are able to handle stressful situations better, while those with low ego resiliency may act in a more rigid or confused way (Letzring, Block, & Funder, 2005). Ego control entails individuals' ability to restrain impulses and varies from low to high, both of which can be adaptive for the individual depending on the situation. Low ego control may facilitate more spontaneous expressions and friendliness, while high ego control may support the individual towards more disciplined and directed behavior (Block, 2002; Block & Block, 2006; Letzring et al., 2005). Research on ego resiliency and ego control suggests that these two aspects of the personality can be important for outcomes later in life (see, e.g., Asendorpf, Borkenau, Ostendorpf, & van Aken, 2001; Asendorpf & Denissen, 2006; see Bohane, Maguire, & Richardson, 2017 for a review). Despite their relevance for understanding development, little research has examined

how ego resiliency and ego control develop over time from childhood to adulthood. Little is also known about what implications personality development may have for adult adaptation, such as identity development and well-being.

The identity is an important part of psychosocial development as it provides the individual with a feeling of continuity between the past, present, and future (Erikson, 1968). This part of the self begins to develop in adolescence, but continues to be important throughout life. Identity development is particularly important as people are moving into early adulthood, as this period requires the maintenance of a sense of sameness and continuity while entering a new phase of life, adulthood (Arnett, 2012). However, because identity development is central already before adulthood, most people will enter early adulthood with an initially formed identity that may involve goals and decisions concerning who they want to be, or how they see themselves as adults. In the Swedish socio-cultural context, most people conceive of themselves as adults when they reach their 30s (Wängqvist & Frisé, 2016). By then, many have begun their career, established long-term romantic relationships, and had their first child (Statistics Sweden, 2018). This means that in early adulthood, when people are in their 30s to early 40s, for many individuals identity development will involve actually living and implementing previous decisions about their identity (Arnett, 2012; Pals, 1999). In this part of life, challenges for individuals' identity development may involve adjusting their identity according to adult roles and finding a way to maintain a sense of identity in adulthood. However, little is known about how people maintain their sense of identity in early adulthood while they may simultaneously need to manage new demands within their adult roles.

Central to people's psychological development, and particularly their identity development, are the experiences they encounter in life, especially the more difficult ones. Difficult experiences may disrupt and challenge the feeling of coherence and sense of identity. However, people can restore their identity by making sense of their experiences (Bruner, 1990; Pals, 2006a, 2006b). To understand experiences in life, people often tell stories (see, e.g., McAdams, 2018; Pasupathi, McLean, & Weeks, 2009). Stories that are central to people's identities are part of the narrative identity (McAdams, 2015). The narrative identity involves various scenes and memories that are important to the individual, and through which people draw conclusions about who they are, creating a narrative identity that integrates the past, present, and future in a purposeful way (McAdams, 1985). This narrative identity is formed within a cultural context that has bearing on individuals' identity through, for instance, common stories, myths, and norms (Hammack, 2008; McAdams, 2006; McAdams & Pals, 2006; McLean & Syed, 2015). Previous research in the context of the United States (U.S.) has found that challenging experiences are often narrated

with some theme of redemption (McAdams, 2006). That is, a narrative sequencing whereby a negative experience, such as difficult events, is followed by something positive, for instance positive growth. This redemptive sequencing has also been found to be positively connected to well-being (see, e.g., McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). It has also been suggested that in the U.S. redemption is a master narrative, which guides how an appropriate story should be told (McAdams, 2006; McLean & Syed, 2015). This means that negative experiences should be narrated with a positive resolution of some kind. However, little is known about how difficult experiences are narrated in other cultural contexts such as Sweden, or how these narrative patterns are related to well-being.

The general aim of this thesis is to examine people's development into early adulthood, with a focus on identity and personality. Study I examines personality development from childhood to early adulthood and its associations with adult adaptation, such as identity and well-being. Study II investigates identity development in early adulthood and underlying processes of how people with established commitments maintain a sense of identity in their identity development. Study III examines how identity narratives of difficult experiences are described among early adults in Sweden, as well as relations between narrative patterns and well-being.

The first part of this thesis presents theories and research on the development into early adulthood, followed by theories concerning personality development and identity development, each of which is followed by an overview of the research within the field. The link between personality and identity is also addressed at the end of this first part. The second part presents summaries of the three studies of this thesis, followed by a general discussion, ethical considerations, and a conclusion.



## DEVELOPMENT INTO EARLY ADULTHOOD

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“I’ve already finished my education, bought a house, had two children, turned 30, and I have a full-time job. So, all of a sudden, everything’s done...so what happens now?”

Woman, age 33

As this quote from one of the participants in Study II illustrates, there are several life choices individuals need to consider in their development into early adulthood, such as educational and occupational choices, possible parenting, and future goals in life. However, as this woman says in the quote, “what happens now?”; when some of these choices revolving around adult roles have been made and put into action, this time may also involve a need to revisit and develop new goals and commitments in life. As Côté (2000) elegantly noted: “adulthood now constitutes the longest, but the least understood, period of the life course” (p. 2). This lack of understanding concerning the period of adulthood is also evident in its definition and terminology. The first part of adulthood is sometimes referred to as early adulthood (see, e.g., Levinson, 1986), including in this text, or young adulthood (see, e.g., Roberts, Caspi & Moffitt, 2003). In a recent review of this first part of adulthood, it has also been proposed that the developmental period from 30 to 45 years be called established adulthood (Mehta, Arnett, Palmer, & Nelson, 2020). The age definition for this period in life also differs in research. Early or young adulthood is defined in some research as the time between ages 20 and 40 (see, e.g., Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). Some define the age period of early or young adulthood even more broadly, from 18 to 40 (Berk, 2014). It has also been defined more narrowly, from the early 30s to the 40s (Arnett, 2012). Aside from the different age definitions and labels, what most researchers seem to agree on is that what distinguishes early adulthood from other periods in adulthood is that this is a time when many people have made transitions into their new adult roles, for instance within work, romantic relationships, and parenthood. Therefore, as it is roughly from the early 30s to the 40s that many people in today’s Western societies are engaged in their adult roles and establishing a role in society, this is the age definition for early adulthood used in this text.

In many contemporary Western societies the transitions into early adulthood are gradual and prolonged, extending from adolescence to emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Major transitions are often influenced by society, through views on when in life certain events should take place (Neugarten, 1968). These age-graded expectations concerning transitions are sometimes referred to as the social clock (Neugarten, 1968), or biographical master narratives, such as expectations regarding when to get married, have children, or buy a home (Bernsten & Rubin 2004; McLean & Syed, 2015). For many people, the period of early adulthood involves satisfactory engagements in love, sexuality, family life, and fulfilling life goals, but it might also entail a great deal of stress, as early adulthood is the phase of life when people are confronted for the first time with the expectation to meet the demands of adult life (Levinson, 1986; Pals, 1999). Early adults may thus engage in finding their own sense of identity in their adult lives while simultaneously managing new demands within their adult roles and from society. Importantly, this identity development will be influenced by previous commitments and goals established earlier in life (Arnett, 2012).

After transitions have been made into adult roles in early adulthood, such as living in long-term romantic relationships and perhaps becoming parents (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Levinson, 1986), one aspect of development in early adulthood is role immersion (Arnett, 2012). Role immersion involves becoming more invested and engaged in adult roles (Arnett, 2012). This process of becoming more immersed in one's adult roles is similar to what Pals (1999) refers to as identity consolidation – “a process of investing oneself in new adult roles, responsibilities, and contexts” (p. 295) – which also involves the aspect of evaluation in order to create a coherent and positive identity. For instance, family roles may demand a great deal of the individual in terms of daily parenting tasks, both practical ones as well as loving and supporting one's child. With regard to work, people also tend to become more invested in their work roles and also to become more immersed, as they might want to continue developing along their occupational path, advancing and taking on further responsibilities at work (Arnett, 2012). Indeed, in her study, Pals (1999) found that identity consolidation among women in early adulthood was associated with low tension in marriage (among the women who were married), a positive experience of motherhood (if mothers), and work satisfaction. Thus, how people invest in their new adult roles and how well they fit are important for a positive identity development.

When early adults have settled into adult roles, for some it can be challenging to make necessary changes in these roles. This challenge is evident in the previously mentioned quote by a woman who, at the age of 33, wonders what happens now that she has fulfilled all the transitions that are required as an

adult. Challenges to make changes to one's adult role may induce feelings of being trapped that lead to crises (Robinson, 2015). Research has found that, when moving into adulthood and trying to find their place in society, some people actually go through major developmental crises (after the age of 25 but before 35; Robinson, 2015). For instance, Robinson and Wright (2013) found that crises in early adulthood may concern relationship break-up, feeling locked into a relationship, feeling trapped in a job, career change, family, or financial difficulty. Taken together, early adulthood is a time that involves many important identity issues and challenges. However, development in early adulthood – especially identity development – is an understudied area, and little is known about how people maintain their sense of identity in their new position as adults, or how they manage goals and plans to meet their own demands as well as those of society.

## The Swedish Cultural Context

As personality and identity development is situated within a cultural context, it is important to understand the interplay between culture and development (Baltes, Lindenberger & Staudinger, 1988; McAdams & Pals, 2006). The cultural context is also especially important for individuals who are developing into early adulthood, as salient parts of this development (e.g., family life and work) are influenced by the prevailing social environment (Baltes, Reese, & Lipsitt, 1980). In Sweden, many early adults are cohabiting or married and have children (Statistics Sweden, 2018), which means that they are involved with, for instance, cooperating with a partner in daily life and engaging in other adult roles such as parenting. In the mainstream Swedish culture, there are some aspects that may have bearing on people's development of the self in early adulthood; these aspects concern Sweden being considered an individualistic culture, the fact that conformity and not standing out are valued, and the importance of equality.

### An Individualistic Culture

According to the World Values Survey (2015), people in Sweden have high self-expression values, value the tolerance of different aspects of diversity in society, value gender equality, and stress involvement in decision-making. Sweden also represents a society with more secular-rational values, which involve placing less importance on religion, traditional family values, and authority (WVS, 2015). Given these high scores on self-expression values and



secular-rational values, Sweden stands out as a cultural context. However, similar to many other European countries and Western societies, Sweden represents an individualistic culture. Early adults in present-day Sweden have grown up in a context that emphasizes individual choice and where identity can be viewed as an individual project (Wängqvist & Frisé, 2016). Indeed, it has been suggested that cultural aspects related to individualistic or collectivistic cultures influence the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In the more individualistic cultures, the self is seen as independent from others in that it is experienced as an inner sense of uniqueness. In individualistic cultures, others provide a basis for comparison, and one's relations with others support the achievement and actualization of the self. It has also been proposed that more individualistic societies emphasize autonomy, emotional independence, and individual initiative, whereas collectivist societies emphasize more of a group identity, solidarity to the group, and group decision-making (Hofstede, 1980). Communicated by values, for example, these different cultural aspects guide norms and opinions, as well as behaviors, that become part of people's identities (McLean & Syed, 2015).

Conceptions of adulthood (see Arnett, 2001) exemplify how values in individualistic and collectivistic cultures can have bearing on people's perceptions of what it means to be an adult (Nelson & Luster, 2015). In China, a collectivistic culture, supporting one's parents financially has been found to be important for attaining adult status (Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004), compared to studies in the U.S., where few people rate this as important (Nelson & Luster, 2015). Within the Swedish context, research has shown that adult markers are similar to those found in other individualistic cultures (i.e., accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and being financially independent; Wängqvist & Frisé, 2016). However, adult markers indicating interdependence with others – becoming less self-oriented and developing greater consideration for others – were also highly rated (Wängqvist & Frisé, 2016). Thus, what is valued within a culture may be important for conceptions of adulthood.

## Conformity and the Law of Jante

The cultural norm for many Swedes is to regard avoiding conflict as a positive quality and a way of showing respect for the other person (Daun, 2005). Thus, combined with the dominant cultural frame of individualism in Sweden, conformity and being modest are also valued qualities (Trost, 2012). In relation to conformity, another cultural aspect that is shared among the Scandinavian countries is the *Law of Jante* (Sandemose, 1933; see, e.g., Avant & Knutsen, 1993). This social law has come to represent the meaning that you should not

stand out in a crowd or act superior to others. Research on cultural differences has also suggested that the Law of Jante is important for status-seeking behavior, which was found to be lower in a Swedish/Finnish sample compared to other countries (Huberman, Loch, & Öncüler, 2004). However, it should be noted that this does not mean that status-seeking behavior is nonexistent in Scandinavian countries; rather, the cultural expression of this behavior may have unique characteristics, particular to a Scandinavian cultural context. However, regarding the identity, this social law stating that you should not stand out compared to others may influence the possibilities for how early adults in Sweden are able to express their identities – or, to put it differently, the way individuals narrate experiences that are important to their identity.

## Equality

Individualization plays a role in Swedish culture, but in many cases is subordinated to values such as equality and gender equality (Heinö, 2009). Gender equality is an important contemporary Swedish value (Towns, 2002), and Sweden is often referred to as one of the most gender-equal countries in the world (European Institute of Gender Equality, 2017). Early adults in today's Sweden have grown up with these gender-equal values, during what is sometimes called *the gender revolution* (Gerson, 2010). This means that they were children at a time when fathers had the opportunity to take paternity leave for the first time, public daycare became increasingly available, and political agendas aimed to facilitate fathers' and mothers' equal sharing of family responsibilities (Haas, 1992; Haas & Hwang, 2013).

Research has shown that Swedes conform less to traditional gender role norms compared with other countries, although it should be noted that gender role conformity is still a challenging issue for many (Kling, Holmqvist Gattario, & Frisé, 2017). However, regarding issues within areas important to early adulthood, such as parenthood, research has also found gender differences indicating that Swedish women in their mid-20s talk more about parenthood being a social norm than men do (Frisén, Carlsson, & Wängqvist, 2014). This, and further research asserting that parenthood may be a more pronounced issue for women in Sweden (Gyberg & Frisé, 2017), suggests that although Sweden is a country with egalitarian norms, issues in early adulthood may have different meanings for men and women in their development. Taken together, in the Swedish cultural context, these aspects of the culture may be important to the development of the self in early adulthood, namely individualism, conformity (e.g., *the Law of Jante*), and equality.



# PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

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Personality is a vast field that involves several different perspectives, but a general view is that it can be viewed as a person's characteristics in terms of their thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Personality is one part of the self. One of the renowned perspectives on personality is traits. Personality traits entail important aspects of individual differences between people that capture major features of personality. Presented below are personality traits, and the meta-traits of ego resiliency and ego control.

## Personality Traits

Personality traits, or dispositional tendencies, concern common individual differences in the way people think, feel, and behave (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008). Traits are also considered to be generally consistent across situations, and reasonably stable over time and over the life span (Damian, Spengler, Sutu, & Roberts, 2019; Roberts, Wood, & Caspi, 2008). In addition to this, researchers have also demonstrated that traits show high heritability (Krueger & Johnson, 2008). Within the trait perspective there are several different trait models, and *the Big Five/the five-factor model* has been used extensively in personality research (see, e.g., Costa, McCrae, & Löckenhoff, 2019; McCrae & Costa, 2008; Roberts et al., 2006).

The Big Five refers to five broad dimensional traits: *extraversion*, *agreeableness*, *conscientiousness*, *neuroticism*, and *openness to experience* (John & Srivastava, 1999; McCrae & Costa, 1999). *Extraverted* individuals are described as energetic, dominant, and outgoing. Meanwhile, individuals who are introverted tend to be quieter and inhibited, and to follow others (Caspi et al., 2005). *Agreeableness* is characterized by aspects that are helpful in relations with others, such as being cooperative, considerate, polite, kind, and empathic. Low levels of this trait dimension involve being aggressive, cynical, manipulative, and rude. *Conscientiousness* refers to impulse control, which facilitates goal-directed behavior such as planning and organizing. People high in this trait tend to study hard, be on time, and to not procrastinate (John et al., 2008). On the other side of this dimension, low conscientiousness is characterized by

being irresponsible, distractible, unreliable, and careless (Caspi et al., 2005). The degree of *neuroticism* reflects an individual's emotional stability – being unstable, insecure, and anxious or relaxed, calm, and emotionally stable. *Openness to experience* refers to an individual's degree of complexity in their mental life. People high in this trait enjoy learning new things, and look for new stimuli in activities. Meanwhile, those on the other pole of this dimension are rigid in their attitudes (John et al., 2008). Overall, the Big Five structures tend to generalize across different samples and can be found across cultures (Costa et al., 2019; John et al., 2008).

## Personality Trait Development Over Time

To explore how people develop their personality over time, two aspects can be considered: 1) *continuity*, or how much stability there is; and 2) *change*, or how much personality varies over time. The degree of continuity can be examined in relation to how people develop their personality over time in relation to other individuals within the same population, so-called rank-order stability (Roberts et al., 2008). This can shed light on whether a person who was ranked high within the population, such as high on extraversion, is still ranked high in relation to others on this trait when measured again. But there can also be change in relation to how much average change there is within the population for a certain personality trait; whether the sample as a whole increases or decreases over time (Caspi et al., 2005).

A meta-analysis has shown that over time there is considerable individual continuity for the Big Five personality traits – that is, rank-order stability – and that this continuity increases from childhood to adulthood (Roberts, & DelVecchio, 2000). Furthermore, personality change has also been found – that is, mean-level changes over time – with more personality change in young adulthood than in other parts of the life span (age 20-40; Roberts et al., 2006). In line with these findings, principles of personality development have been established, namely *the cumulative continuity principle* and *the maturity principle*. *The cumulative continuity principle* states that, over the life span, people will show more continuity with regard to personality traits; that is, higher rank-order stability (Roberts et al., 2008). This does not mean that people do not change over time, rank-order stability across longer periods of time is often modest. However, recent findings from a longitudinal study that examined personality in adolescence and follow the same individuals over 50 years showed that personality traits displayed rank-order stability above .20 (and coefficients adjusted for measurement error above .25) indicating trait consistency also over longer periods of time (Damian et al., 2019).

*The maturity principle* states that as people age they become more mature, and in terms of the Big Five personality traits they become more agreeable, conscientious, and emotionally stable (opposite of neuroticism; Roberts et al., 2008). Some researchers also suggest that the maturity principle has a psychosocial foundation. They propose that people's exposure to adult roles in their culture, and their investment in the responsibilities that go along with them, for instance within parenthood and work roles, will lead them to develop more mature and adaptive traits (Roberts, Wood, & Smith, 2005).

## Meta-traits

Personality traits are often considered to be part of hierarchal models (Cloninger, Svrakic, & Przybeck, 1993; John & Srivastava, 1999; McCrae & Costa, 1999). A hierarchal model is comprised of traits that are situated within a hierarchy, in which correlated traits are grouped together into broader traits. Traits situated below the highest level in the hierarchy thus have both shared and unique variance that can explain differences and similarities between individuals (DeYoung, 2015). For the Big Five traits, which are often considered to represent the highest level within a hierarchal model, there are facets below each of the five traits, or narrower and more specific constructs, such as modesty (example of a facet of agreeableness), anxiety, hostility/irritability (example of a facet of neuroticism), and self-discipline (example of a facet of conscientiousness; John et al., 2008). However, researchers have also examined how the Big Five traits may be understood within a hierarchal model involving higher-order traits above the five traits (DeYoung, 2006, 2010, 2015; Digman, 1997).

The Big Five traits have been assumed to be independent of each other, and not correlated. However, there is recognition within the field that there are relations between the Big Five traits that may be driven by higher-order factors (Chang, Connelly, & Geeza, 2012). DeYoung and colleagues (2002; DeYoung, 2006) identified two overarching higher-order traits above the Big Five dimensions, which they labeled *stability* and *plasticity* (see also Digman, 1997). *Plasticity* represents the shared variance between extraversion and openness, and *stability* the shared variance among agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (opposite of neuroticism).

## Meta-Traits as Adaptive Systems

DeYoung and colleagues (2002) postulated that stability and plasticity are part of an adaptive system. In this system, the function of stability is to defend against interruption, so that goals or strategies to reach certain goals are not hindered by impulses (DeYoung, 2015). The function of plasticity is exploration and the ability to form new goals, interpretations, and strategies (DeYoung, 2015). Thus, higher-order traits can facilitate the understanding and function of personality traits as part of an adaptive system that helps the individual reach their goals and form new ones (Block, 2010; DeYoung, 2010).

Furthermore, DeYoung also argued that, besides stability and plasticity, Block and Block's (1980a) personality constructs of *ego resiliency* and *ego control* represent meta-traits (DeYoung, 2010, see also Chang et al., 2012). The two systems of higher-order traits are similar, in that they can be seen in the light of restraint and adaptability (see Block, 2010 and DeYoung, 2010). However, DeYoung (2010) differentiated between Block's (2002) view of personality as an affect-processing system and his own view of it as a more goal-directed system. The affect processing system that entails the self-regulatory processes of ego resiliency and ego control refers to an individual's ability to avoid anxiety by handling impulses that come from within and are in line with what is acceptable in a particular environment. Furthermore, it has been suggested that, as stability and plasticity on the one hand and ego resiliency and ego control on the other represent two different systems, they should also be related in different ways to the Big Five traits (DeYoung, 2010).

## Ego Resiliency and Ego Control

Block and Block (1980a, 2006) formulated a model of personality with two constructs, *ego resiliency* and *ego control*. *Ego resiliency* refers to individuals' capacity to adjust to their environment and to the different situational demands that are part of life (Block & Block, 2006). Highly resilient individuals have good cognitive functioning and social skills, and can quickly adapt to new situations. People who are less resilient, also referred to as ego brittle, are less adaptive and flexible, and have more difficulty recovering after a stressful experience. Individuals with low ego resiliency are therefore also at more risk of experiencing anxiety and negative emotions than those with high ego resiliency (Block & Kremen, 1996). Furthermore, individuals with high levels of ego resiliency are more likely than those with low levels of resiliency to be self-confident and show good psychological adjustment (Block & Kremen, 1996).

*Ego control* is related to acting on internal impulses. Low ego control involves more immediate behavior based on impulses without holding back, for example more volatile emotional expressions (Block & Block, 1980a, 2006). Individuals who exhibit low ego control are more spontaneous in their behavior, have difficulty delaying gratification, and display their emotional responses more directly even if it is not appropriate in a particular situation (Eisenberg et al., 1996). However, low ego control in these individuals can also facilitate expressions of warmth and spontaneity, which can be positive for relationships and amusement in life (Letzring et al. 2005). In parallel, individuals who display high ego control are more constrained, emotionally unexpressive, and conforming, and have difficulty with uncertainty (Block & Block, 2006). Thus, a moderate level of ego control, and the ability to shift one's level of ego control as the circumstances warrant, is theoretically considered ideal (Block, 2002).

Together, ego resiliency and ego control refer to a dynamic system of adaptive regulation (Block & Block, 1980a, 2006). In this dynamic system, the role of ego resiliency is to regulate the levels of ego control depending on what the environment requires. High ego resiliency involves flexibility and the ability to shift one's behavior in an adaptive way depending on the situation, by either reducing or increasing ego control. Block (2002) describes that an adaptive individual with high ego resiliency "will be able to work playfully on a distant goal and also be able to relax and be pleasuring when the circumstance permits" (p. 12). Thus, ego resiliency and ego control are assumed to be connected to each other in ways that can facilitate, or hinder, the individual's development.

## Personality Development: Ego Resiliency and Ego Control

Few studies have investigated ego resiliency and ego control longitudinally from childhood to late adolescence. A U.S. study investigating this found rank-order stability between adjacent and distal ages from age three to 18 (assessed six times) in both boys and girls concerning ego control (Block, 1967). Further, in the same study, boys' rank-order showed signs of stability for ego resiliency; though the same was not found for girls, who displayed more variability over time but with rank-order correlations between adjacent ages. With another wave in this longitudinal study, similar findings were evident also at age 23 (Block & Block, 2006). With regard to mean-level changes in ego resiliency, research conducted in Sweden has shown a small decline across ages two, three, seven, and eight (Wessels, Lamb, Hwang, & Broberg, 1997). The same study showed a small increase in ego control. Following up on these results with one more assessment at age 15, Chuang, Lamb, and Hwang (2006)



showed that the increase in ego control continued, as did the decline in ego resiliency; however, this was the case only for boys. For girls the trend was the reverse, and they became more resilient in adolescence. In sum, these studies suggest that ego control increases over time from childhood to adolescence. In contrast, ego resiliency appears to show variability in its development over time, with more gender differences.

## Ego Resiliency and Ego Control, and Associations with Adult Functioning

Personality traits are associated in different ways with important life outcomes (Anglim, et al., 2020; John et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2007; Specht et al., 2011). In childhood and adolescence personality can, for instance, be important for health outcomes in adulthood such as psychological wellbeing, physical health and substance dependence (Caspi, 2000; Hampson, Edmonds, Goldberg, Dubanoski, & Hillier, 2013; Hampson, 2019; Moffitt et al., 2011). For example, a recent meta-analysis found that, for self-regulatory processes similar to ego control, a higher ability to restrain one's impulses in the early school years was associated with fewer symptoms of physical illness, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse in adulthood (Robson, Allen, & Howard, 2020).

Many studies on ego resiliency and ego control have mostly focused on associations between these constructs and outcomes such as health and behavioral problems in childhood and adolescence (Asendorpf & van Aken, 1999; Caspi & Silva, 1995; Chuang et al., 2006; Eisenberg et al., 1996; Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, & Meeus, 2010), whereas less research has examined how ego resiliency and control in childhood are important for outcomes in adulthood. For example, Robins and colleagues (1996) found that adolescents with high ego resilience and intermediate levels of ego control were successful in school, had higher intelligence, and were less likely to suffer from psychopathology compared to individuals who were less resilient. Adolescents who showed low ego resilience and had high levels of ego control were more prone to display internalizing problems. Low ego control and low ego resiliency were associated with tendencies for academic, behavioral, and emotional problems (Robins et al., 1996).

The few studies focusing on how ego resiliency and ego control are associated with positive functioning in adulthood have found that low ego control during childhood was associated with externalizing problems in early adulthood (Causadias, Salvatore, & Sroufe, 2012). In parallel, ego resiliency in childhood was negatively related to internalizing problems in early adulthood. This study also found evidence of relations between ego resiliency and positive functioning in areas of work and social and romantic relationships, but not for

ego control (Causadias et al., 2012). Another study also found that ego resiliency and ego control in childhood were related to the degree to which adult roles had been attained by age 23 (Denissen, Asendorpf, & Van Aken, 2008). Individuals who were more resilient tended to leave their parental home, establish a first romantic relationship, and get a part-time job earlier than those with low resiliency, combined with either high ego control or low ego control. Furthermore, a longitudinal study also found relations between children who were classified as undercontrolled at age three and more negative emotionality at age 26 such as being easily upset, feeling mistreated and betrayed by others (Caspi et al., 2003). Taken together, the few longitudinal studies investigating relations between ego resiliency and ego control from childhood to adulthood show that there are associations between these two constructs and important outcomes in life. However, personality development from childhood to adulthood, and implications for adult adaptation is still an understudied area (Costa et al., 2019; Soto & Tackett, 2015; Wängqvist, Lamb, Frisén, & Hwang, 2015).



# IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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Identity, which is one part of the self, is often defined as an inner sense of sameness and coherence over time (Erikson, 1968). It provides the individual with a feeling of continuity between the past, present, and future, and across important areas of life. Even though one's identity will likely continue to develop throughout life, a sense of being the same across time and areas of one's life is likely to be strived after. This development is not only an individual process, but is also intertwined with the individual's society and culture. Erikson (1950, 1968) developed one of the most notable theories of identity development within psychology, which was part of his psychosocial theory of human development. This section begins with a brief overview of Erikson's psychosocial theory of development, followed by the identity status approach and narrative identity development.

## Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Development

Erikson (1950, 1968) developed a psychosocial theory of life span development, describing eight stages that individuals go through across life. According to the theory, at each stage there is a developmental crisis that the individual needs to attend to. This crisis is generated by changes both within the individual and in the social environment. For each developmental crisis, there is resolution between a positive and a negative pole. That they are resolutions does not mean they are either negative or positive; rather, they can be viewed in a more dynamic way. For example, in the case of positive identity resolutions, the balance should be more towards the positive direction, but to reach such resolution there needs to be room for uncertainty as well (Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2020; Schwartz et al., 2015). Erikson (1968) also pointed out that there is interdependence between the resolutions of earlier stages and later development. Therefore, earlier stages lay the foundation for later stages, with some degree of openness to change and development in that developmental moment. Importantly, this development is not only an internal, individual process but also one that is intertwined with the individual's culture and society (Erikson, 1950).

Within Erikson's theory of life span development, the first developmental stage in childhood includes *trust* versus *mistrust*, followed by *autonomy* versus *shame and doubt*, while the third stage involves *initiative* versus *guilt*. As the child enters the elementary school years, *industry* versus *inferiority* represents the fourth stage (Erikson, 1950). The fifth stage, *identity* versus *identity diffusion*, is described in Erikson's writings as the main issue that arises in adolescence. Below, the stages that are central to the transition into and the time in adulthood (early adulthood to midlife) are presented, starting with *identity* versus *identity diffusion*, continuing with *intimacy* versus *isolation*, and finally *generativity* versus *stagnation*.

## Identity and Identity Diffusion

Identity plays an important role across the developmental stages in Erikson's psychosocial theory of life span development (1968). Identity is important because it connects and integrates people's earlier experiences with who they are in the present and who they believe they will become in the future. It provides the individual with a feeling of coherence, and with a sense of being the same over time and across important life domains (Erikson, 1968). Several approaches to identity development have evolved from Erikson's writings. Two of these are commonly used in research on identity development: the identity status approach (Marcia, 1966) and the narrative approach to identity (McAdams, 1985).

According to Erikson's conceptualization, a stable identity is associated with healthy psychosocial functioning (Syed & McLean, 2016). However, individuals might experience difficulties in their identity development, not moving towards creating commitments and risking a less clearly integrated identity; that is, *identity confusion*. This lack of a coherent identity across time may lead to psychological problems (Erikson, 1968).

As individuals move on to establish themselves in the adult world, a well-integrated and coherent identity is also important to the issue of *intimacy* and *isolation*, which comes to the forefront in early adulthood. Erikson (1968) believed that establishing a sense of identity before moving on to questions of intimacy was important in order for the individual to experience real intimacy with a partner. Otherwise, the relationship might become an instrument for the individual's own identity concerns (Kroger, 2017). Individuals will then use the relationship to try to come to an understanding of who they are, and not move closer to mutuality and commitment with another person.

## The Developmental Crises of Intimacy and Generativity

According to Erikson's psychosocial theory of human development (1950, 1968), the main concern for the development in early adulthood is *intimacy* versus *isolation*, followed by *generativity* versus *stagnation* in midlife. The first developmental stage after the crisis of identity-identity confusion is *intimacy* versus *isolation*. This involves the quality of, and being able to commit oneself to, a relationship even though certain sacrifices and compromises may be necessary (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Relationships can involve, for instance, those with romantic partners or friends, or some type of communion with others (Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2020). The negative pole in this development stage is a sense of isolation. Isolation refers to an incapacity to share intimacy, and may lead to more stereotyped interpersonal relations (Erikson, 1968). Thus, isolation is possible even when one is in a relationship. Following this developmental stage in Erikson's theory of development is the task of guiding and caring for others and the next generation (e.g., one's children): *generativity* versus *stagnation*, or self-absorption.

Generativity versus stagnation and self-absorption is the developmental crisis that occurs during midlife (Erikson, 1950). Generativity refers to the concern for caring for and guiding the next generation as well as giving back to society in different ways. However, Erikson (1968) points out that merely bringing children into the world does not mean that an individual has attained generativity. Instead, generativity should be viewed as how an individual facilitates the current and future well-being of other people (Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2020). The counterpole of generativity, stagnation, refers to becoming more self-absorbed, self-indulged, in relation to others (Erikson, 1968). In this way, the individual is more motivated by striving for his or her own comfort than the well-being of others (Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2020). Indeed, generativity is itself an important driving power and motivation for each generation to care for the next (Erikson, 1968). As noted earlier, there is a degree of interdependence between all the stages of Erikson's theory of development; thus, preceding development, such as identity development, may be connected to issues concerning intimacy and generativity. A balance towards more positive resolution of the identity crises can also facilitate moving towards communion and committing to a relationship. Furthermore, research has found that a more optimal identity development is related to the development of generativity (Beaumont & Pratt, 2011).

## Marcia's Identity Status Approach

Building on Erikson's work, Marcia (1966) elaborated on the perspective of identity development and operationalized it into two observable processes of identity formation: exploration and commitment. The *exploration process* involves thinking of and trying out different choices or roles in important identity-defining areas of life, while the *commitment process* refers to making identity-defining commitments, plans, or goals (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). For example, using the semi-structured identity status interview (Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993), the individual's identity formation or development can be assessed into four different identity statuses based on the degree of exploration and commitment in important areas of life (Marcia, 1966).

*Identity achievement* refers to the identity status of individuals who have made commitments through the process of exploration. This identity status is considered to represent the most mature level of identity development, and has been linked to several positive outcomes such as more internal locus of control and higher self-esteem (see, e.g., Lillevoll, Kroger, & Martinussen, 2013; Ryeng, Kroger, & Martinussen, 2010). Waterman (2015) described the exploration part of the identity formation for identity achievement as follows: "it appears that going through the valley of distress is the route to the peaks of self-understanding and well-being" (p. 312). Individuals who have explored and then made their commitments are often flexible but also persevere in following the path they have chosen. The identity status of people who show a high degree of commitments but without the exploration beforehand is called *foreclosure*. People in the group coded to foreclosure have not explored before deciding on their commitments in life. These individuals are usually perceived as well functioning, but can be more fragile if they find themselves in new situations different from their familiar contexts (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). The identity development of those who are struggling to make commitments but are still in an exploratory part of their identity development is called *moratorium*. Individuals who are considered to be in a state of moratorium are in the process of defining themselves. Sometimes, they also engage others in their internal conflict. There are also people who tend to get stuck in the struggle, and an active phase of exploring might turn into rumination (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Luyckx et al., 2008). In the last status, *identity diffusion*, people show few signs of being engaged in exploration, and display a lack of commitment (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). They seem to lack an internal sense of identity and are therefore more easily persuaded to change direction, which might give the impression that they are flexible and adaptive. Instead, for many in the identity diffused group, it is actually the external world they turn to that defines who

they are (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Taken together, how people form their identity is important for different outcomes in life, and may also influence the ways in which individuals approach new contexts and continued identity development.

Marcia originally defined important life areas from Erikson's writings, concerning occupation and ideology (religious and political positions; Kroger & Marcia, 2011), and researchers have since found additional areas of importance to address. The different life areas in which the identity processes of exploration and commitment are assessed are often called identity domains. These domains represent identity issues that are assumed to be salient for many individuals such as, in adulthood, the areas of work, romantic relationships, and parenthood. In order to determine individuals' global identity status, information attained from the domains regarding the processes of exploration and commitment is used to point towards a hypothesized underlying structure of their identity (Marcia, 2007). The domains should be considered as part of a "map" indicating the development of a person's identity (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia, 2007). In this way, a person can be engaged in an exploration process in one domain while having made commitments after exploration in another domain (Schwartz, 2001).

## Identity Status Development in Adulthood

Most research on identity status and identity development has been conducted primarily in adolescence and emerging adulthood, while there are few studies on identity status development in adulthood (see, e.g., Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010; Meeus, 2011). Employing the studies that have examined identity status development in different age spans, a meta-analysis of identity status change and stability from late adolescence to early adulthood showed that patterns of progressive change are more common than regressive patterns (i.e., from a status with less exploration and/or lower degree of commitments towards established commitments after exploration; Kroger, et al., 2010). This meta-analysis also found that, in general, there are more progressive movements towards the more mature statuses from adolescence to adulthood. Interestingly, the study also showed that a large number of people who had made commitments (i.e., achieved identity or foreclosure) also stay stable in their original identity status from late adolescence to adulthood (Kroger et al., 2010). Another meta-analysis has also pointed to the notion that there appears to be more identity status stability in adulthood than adolescence (Meeus, 2011). Waterman (1999) acknowledged this relative stability of identity statuses, and that the statuses of identity achievement and foreclosure can be expected to be more stable because people in these statuses might not feel they



need to change if they have succeeded in implementing their goals, values, and beliefs (i.e., their commitments).

There are only a few studies on identity status in adulthood (see, e.g., Arneaud, Alea, & Espinet, 2016; Gyberg & Frisé, 2017; Kroger, 2002; Kroger & Haslett, 1991; Kroger & Green, 1996), and even fewer assessing identity status development longitudinally across adulthood (see, e.g., Cramer, 2004, 2017; Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, & Kokko, 2005, 2016; Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2000). The longitudinal studies investigating identity development over time in adulthood generally show slow, progressive movements over time (Kroger, 2017). A study of identity development in young adulthood (ages 18-35) showed that there was a decrease in moratorium and foreclosure over time, and that levels of identity achievement moderately progressed (Cramer, 2017). However, the same study also found little change in levels of identity diffusion. Another longitudinal study from early to late mid-adulthood (ages 30-61) found that identity achievement and moratorium increased, and identity diffusion decreased, from early to mid-adulthood, indicating that substantial development takes place during this time in life (Cramer, 2004). However, this study also found a surprising increase in foreclosure from mid- to late mid-adulthood. Another study of identity status development, using four measurement points of identity status at ages 27, 36, 42, and 50, also showed great variability with regard to individual trajectories of identity status development over time (Fadjukoff et al., 2016). This study showed that, for overall identity, the progressive sequence of diffusion-foreclosure-moratorium-achievement was the most frequent for both men and women. Further, across these ages (27, 36, 42, and 50) stability was common over two measurement points, but remaining stable in one status across the four measurement points was rare. Interestingly, in early adulthood (ages 27 to 36), this longitudinal study showed a peak in the foreclosed identity status, and at age 36 this was the most common status while identity achievement was the most frequent overall identity status at all other ages (Fadjukoff, et al., 2016; Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2000). Taken together, meta-studies suggest that there are progressive movements towards identity achievement from late adolescence to early adulthood, and high stability within the committed statuses (Kroger et al., 2010; Meeus, 2011). Furthermore, longitudinal studies of identity status development in adulthood also indicate that progressive movements towards identity achievement continue over time, but that there is also important individual variability in this development, with different trajectories of identity development in adulthood (Fadjukoff et al., 2016).

Theoretically, it has been suggested that identity status development in adulthood may involve movements back and forth between identity achievement and moratorium – moratorium-achievement-moratorium-achievement –

so-called MAMA cycles (Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992). These cycles involve identity reconstruction and a movement between exploration and commitment and consolidation (Marcia, 2002). The process of identity reconstruction would also be more likely when and if the individual is faced with disequilibrating events. Such events could also lead to a regression to earlier identity structures, such as brief identity diffusion, which might entail feelings of being scattered and confused. But, identity regression might be necessary for a new structure to emerge, making it a part of identity development (Marcia, 2002). However, in early adulthood, Pulkkinen and Kokko (2000) found high rates of foreclosure at age 36 compared to age 27 (at which achievement was most common), and suggested that their findings indicate that foreclosure-achievement-foreclosure-achievement (FAFA) cycles might be prominent in later early adulthood. There have also been similar findings of foreclosure after earlier exploration in another study in early adulthood (age 25 to 35; Valde, 1996). Taken together, research suggests that identity status development in early adulthood can involve either regressive or progressive cycle movements. However, there are few studies on identity development in early adulthood, and little is known about what patterns of development are common during this time in life.

## Qualitative Investigations Using the Identity Status Approach

Data from the identity status interview has also been used in qualitative investigations of life stories. For example, Josselson (1996) examined women who entered adulthood from different pathways of identity, and found that those with characteristics of an achieved identity status tended to show more integration of the old with the new in their stories. Furthermore, in her research she has also found that some of the people characterized as diffused had a more fragmented life story over time, with less consistent themes (Josselson, 2017).

In the identity status interview, participants are asked in-depth questions about exploration and commitments as well as about the history of how they have come to their present identity resolutions, how the past has influenced them, and how they have changed from who they were before. There is thus an embedded developmental focus on *how*, *when*, and *why* a person's exploration and commitments came to be in the identity status interview (Kroger & Maria, 2011; Marcia et al., 1993). Therefore, the interview provides in-depth qualitative material on individuals' identity development.

Using the identity status interview, Kroger (2002) found several identity processes, besides those of exploration and commitment, for individuals who maintained identity achievement in late adulthood. These identity processes

involved reintegration, rebalancing, readjustment, refinement, and maintenance of continuity in late adulthood (Kroger, 2002). Kroger (2002) also found that these processes differed across old age. For the younger old adults (ages 65-75), the identity processes were *reintegrating important identity elements*, *tying up the package*, and *establishing visible forms of identity continuity*. Among the very old adults (ages 76 and above), the salient processes were instead *living in the present* and *retaining important identity elements through loss*. Similarly, in their qualitative investigations on identity development in the late 20s, Carlsson, Wängqvist, and Frisé (2015) also found that individuals in committed statuses and with stable identity status development had an ongoing identity development that involved three developmental processes. This development was represented by change on a continuum between a deepening and a weakening of the identity. The deepening process involved a capacity to adjust and change, whereas the weakening process represented more rigidity and resistance to change. The first process, *approach to changing life conditions*, concerned the individual's approach to the fact that life changes as time goes by. The process of *meaning making* concerned adding elements of meaning to the identity with a substantial increase in meaning making, or towards similar or few new reflections. The third process in the model, *development of personal life direction*, concerned the development of a personal life direction whereby the deepening endpoint represents increased agency to make independent decisions. The weakening endpoint of this process represented becoming more constrained by social norms and expectations from others. Taken together, previous research using qualitative information from the identity status interview shows that, in order for individuals to maintain their identity across time, there remain important identity development processes to investigate (Carlsson et al., 2015; Kroger, 2002). However, little is known about how people maintain their sense of identity in early adulthood while they may simultaneously need to manage new demands within their adult roles.

## Narrative Identity Development

Approaching identity from another perspective than the identity status model, narrative identity researchers focus on the stories people create about themselves and their experiences in life (McAdams, 1985). The main focus for identity development within this perspective concerns how people, through their creation of a life story, integrate past, present, and future in a meaningful and purposeful way (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Throughout people's lives, they continually develop this life story by integrating new experiences (McAdams,

2015; McLean, 2017). The evolving *narrative identity*, or life story, thus provides the individual with a sense of sameness over time that Erikson (1968) described as a key aspect of identity. The narrative identity begins to develop in adolescence, when individuals start to integrate their experiences into a fuller life story (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Habermas & Reese, 2015).

McAdams (1985, 2001) described narrative identity as seeing the individual's identity as a book containing important chapters in life that involve, for instance, high points, low points, turning points, and challenging experiences. There are several ways through which this narrative identity is created, and a significant process involved in identity development is *autobiographical reasoning*; that is, connections referring to how the past has led to the person's present identity (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams & McLean, 2013). An example of autobiographical reasoning is *meaning making*, which concerns how individuals may narrate experiences that changed their perception in some way; for instance, making sense of the past and how it has had an influence on one's current identity (McLean & Thorne, 2003).

Other ways in which autobiographical reasoning can facilitate identity development are through narrative processes such as exploratory processing, change connections, and personal growth (McLean et al., 2019). Exploratory processing refers to how individuals, in their narratives, openly explore the meaning of an experience in order to understand its impact on their identity (Pals, 2006a). People might describe how they have discussed their experience with others, and show other ways that indicate that they have reflected upon the experience and its meaning for their identity. Change connections involve ways in which individuals refer in their narratives to how an experience has changed their view of themselves, or has led them to see new qualities they did not know they had (Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007). Personal growth is often referred to as some kind of positive change that is evident in individuals' narratives. This could be, for instance, narratives involving development, or new insights about one's identity (McLean et al., 2019).

It is also important to take into account how elaborate or coherent the narrative is in terms of its structure, often referred to as *narrative coherence* (McLean et al., 2019). Narrative coherence refers to how consistent a person's story is; that is, telling a story so that life events can be understood by a listener in relation to the context, time, and theme (Köber, Schmiedek, & Habermas, 2015). Researchers in the narrative field have examined narrative coherence with different approaches that address both similar and dissimilar components of coherence (Adler, Waters, Poh, & Seitz, 2018). In general, *temporal coherence* involves the relation to time and the ability to tell a story about events including when they took place, and ordering the story with a beginning, middle, and end so that there is a clear temporal order of events (Köber et al., 2015;

Reese, Haden, Baker-Ward, Bauer, Fivush, & Ornstein, 2011). Research investigating how narrative identity develops over time has found that people become better at narrating their story with temporal coherence (Reese et al., 2011). This development of temporal coherence peaks in young adulthood, to later descend in midlife (Reese et al., 2011). Another component of narrative coherence is *thematic coherence*, which generally refers to the process of telling one's story with a dominant theme. This can include how different parts of an individual's life reflect a similar theme, and information about the essence of his or her story (Köber et al., 2015; Reese et al., 2011). Thematic coherence does not seem to diminish with age, but rather increases across the life span (although the increase is slower in adulthood; Reese et al., 2011). McLean (2008) found a similar pattern of more thematic coherence among adults over age 65 compared to younger individuals (ages from late adolescence to young adulthood). In parallel, a study by Köber and colleagues (2015) showed that thematic coherence increased up to 40 years of age. Taken together, this research shows that many people have formed, and continue to integrate, their narrative identity during early adulthood.

Furthermore, research suggests that significant transitions in life may influence narrative identity development. For example, a study of the transition to college found that autobiographical processes in narratives about romantic high points that entailed positive change connections were related to increased life satisfaction over the following college years (Lilgendahl & McLean, 2020). However, little is still known about narrative identity development in early adulthood (McLean & Lilgendahl, 2019).

## Narratives of Life Challenges

Narratives that involve challenging experiences have been found to be particularly important for the identity (McAdams, 2006; Pals, 2006a, 2006b). Furthermore, how different events are integrated into the narrative identity is critical to well-being, not least when it comes to challenging and more difficult experiences (Adler, Lodi-Smith, Philippe, & Houle, 2016; Pals, 2006a). As difficult experiences can lead to a disruption of identity, creating an identity narrative can facilitate an understanding of the experience and restore order in life (Bruner, 1990; McLean, 2015; Pals, 2006a, 2006b). Regarding early adults, it could be expected that most of them will have encountered some difficult or challenging situation in their lives, and that these experiences have become part of their narrative identity (see, e.g., McAdams, 2001).

Researchers have found several ways in which narratives about difficult experiences are associated with individual growth and well-being (Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011; Pals, 2006a, 2006b). In a study of midlife adults (ages 34

to 68), Lilgendahl and McAdams (2011) found that narratives involving self-growth from negative experiences were associated with well-being (see also McAdams et al., 2001), as opposed to positive experiences, where relations to well-being were not found. Furthermore, a longitudinal study found that narratives of difficult experiences described at age 52 with a coherent positive resolution were associated with increased resiliency from age 21 to 52, which in turn led to a higher life satisfaction at age 61 (Pals, 2006a). Another study also found that the degree to which a person had explored the impact of a challenge on their identity, and had also changed their identity in line with this, predicted personal growth (Lilgendahl, Helson, & John, 2013; see also Pals, 2006a). Taken together, this shows that how people make sense of difficult experiences is related to self-growth processes and well-being.

## Culture and Narrative Identity Development

The concept of culture is important for understanding both similarities and differences within psychological development (Berry et al., 1997). Culture can be defined in several different ways (see, e.g., Valsiner, 2012). For example, it can be viewed as shared activities (i.e., cultural practices) within a group of people as well as shared meaning (i.e., attitudes, values, beliefs; Keller, 2012). In research, cultures, are often being represented by countries by for instance describing them as individualistic or collectivistic (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), but culture exist at many different levels of society (e.g., within regions or smaller subgroups).

For narrative identity development, culture is important in many ways as it has bearing on how an individual tells a story and interprets and understands his or her experiences (Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011; Hammack, 2008, 2011; McAdams & Pals, 2006; Syed, 2017). Individuals learn through culture, and through others in the culture, how to tell a story that is appropriate, given what experiences are being narrated (McAdams, 2006; McLean & Syed, 2015). That is, how people integrate and make sense of their experiences in life is influenced by metaphors, myths, themes in stories, and plots. In this way, culture can influence how narrative identity is spoken about and described (McAdams, 2006). In fact, telling a story is a social process and it is often told to a specific audience, or with a specific audience in mind (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). Narratives are in turn retold to others; thereby, the narrative continues to be refined for the individual's particular cultural context (McLean et al., 2007).

The stories that are part of one's identity are also co-authored with others (McLean, 2015). An example of how culture influences narrative identity

through others is how parents' reminiscing style regarding shared past experiences with their children is associated with narrative identity processes intergenerationally. Parents, for example, play an important role in their children's autobiographical skills through reminiscing (Fivush, 2011). In Western cultures, mothers' reminiscing has been found to be more elaborate and focused on the child, compared to mothers in Eastern cultures. In turn, mothers in Eastern cultures have been found to place the child's experience more in a group context (Fivush, 2011). Furthermore, research suggests that in independent cultures such as those in the West there is more of a focus on the self as an autonomous person within the parental reminiscing style, while in interdependent cultures such as those in the East parents' reminiscing style emphasizes more social and moral values as well as responsibility to others (Fivush et al., 2011). Thus, in their recollection of important memories with their children, parents construct these narratives in ways that highlight different culturally meaningful aspects, such as values and the individual's role. In line with this, researchers have found that autobiographical narratives by adults in Western cultures were more detailed and focused more on the individual's feelings, in contrast to adults in Eastern countries, who had less detailed narratives and focused more on individual activities in relation to others (Wang & Ross 2007). In this way, others can influence narrative identity development, which leads to cultural differences in narrative identity in adulthood.

There are also other ways in which the cultural context influences the individual's narrative identity, such as through *master narratives*. Master narratives are the stories within a culture that provide "guidance for how to be a 'good' member of a culture" (McLean & Syed, 2015, p. 320). They exist at many different levels of the culture such as at the national level, among subgroups such as ethnic minorities (see, e.g., McLean et al., 2018), and also within the family (McLean, 2015; McLean & Syed, 2015). Master narratives are broader than personal narratives, and are important to the individual's identity as people may both integrate them into their own identity and try to resist them (McAdams, 2006; McLean & Syed, 2015). Master narratives can therefore function as a standard that people have to address in relation to narrating their own experiences, and in their interpretation of these experiences (McLean et al., 2018). In their organization and systematization of different types of master narratives, McLean and Syed (2015) described three types: *biographical*, *episodic*, and *structural master narratives*.

*Biographical master narratives* involve the expectations within a cultural context for when life transitions should take place, guiding individuals in when it is appropriate to start school, graduate from high school, get married, have children, and so forth (Bernsten & Rubin 2004; McLean & Syed, 2015). *Episodic master narratives* are those of particular episodes in the past, told by

many in a certain way, for instance how people from the U.S. may talk about 9/11, the terror attack in New York (McLean & Syed, 2015). *Structural master narratives* concern how a story should be told; the form of the narrative. In the U.S. context, McAdams (2006; McAdams et al., 2001) found that the main structural master narrative is redemption. Narratives with redemption are those that involve significant scenes in people's lives, going from a negative scene to a positive outcome of the event, with something positive gained from these negative experiences. McAdams (2006) developed the idea of this cultural master narrative based on inquiries into American history, customs, and values. He pointed to aspects such as the significance of redemption in religion, and the history of the Puritan settlers as well as people who came to the U.S. as slaves. McAdams (2006) also illustrated how redemptive themes are present in everyday magazines and ideas, and how this is emphasized in media as well as among politicians who display their redemptive story in media. The structural master narrative of redemption is thus present in many parts of people's lives in the U.S. context, and has bearing on how individuals' experiences are integrated into their own narrative identity.

In the U.S. context, the redemptive structure, or redemptive sequencing, for how to tell a story about the self is associated with psychological well-being (McAdams et al., 2001). Deviations from this way of narrating experiences – such as in contamination sequencing, in which people narrate positive experiences that led to something bad (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997) – have in turn been found to predict low levels of well-being (McAdams et al., 2001). One explanation for why deviating from the master narrative is related to poorer well-being could be that audiences may react negatively to people who deviate from the cultural norm (Thorne & McLean, 2003). For example, Thorne and McLean (2003) found that an audience reacted negatively to personal narratives of near-death experiences that were considered to be unresolved rather than being narrated with a successful resolution of the difficulty. Therefore, deviating from what is regarded as an acceptable way to narrate a story may have a social cost (McLean & Syed, 2015; Syed & McLean, 2015).

Few studies have been conducted on structural forms of narration in cultures other than in the U.S., addressing for example redemption in personal narratives. A relevant study showed that Jewish-Israeli adolescents tended to show more redemption than Palestinian youth, who showed more themes of trauma after loss but also resistance in their narratives (Hammack, 2011). Benish-Weisman (2009) also showed that Israeli immigrants who felt that their immigration was successful told narratives that included overcoming obstacles to achieve their goals, similar to a redemptive story. However, immigrants who



felt that their immigration was less successful told stories characterized by regression and defeat. Furthermore, a recent study in the United Kingdom (U.K.) examined how people who had adopted a third-person view of a survivor of a tragedy felt that survivors could recover from trauma (Blackie, Colgan, McDonald, & McLean, 2020). This study found common themes of recuperation (i.e., lessening of symptoms over time, coping with the lasting emotional impact) and redemption. Findings in this study showed that recuperation was the most common, which suggests that in the U.K. redemption is not a dominant script for recovery after difficult experiences (Blackie et al., 2020). These studies suggest that redemption may be common elsewhere. However, as much of the narrative research literature has been situated in the U.S. context, little is known about how experiences, such as those of challenges, are narrated in other cultures. How are narratives of difficult experiences told in cultural contexts like Sweden?

# PERSONALITY AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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Personality traits and identity have been theoretically linked in several ways, and it has also been suggested that personality might influence how people develop their identities (Kroger, 2007). Furthermore, together, personality traits and identity can also be understood as components in a personality system (McAdams, 2015; McAdams & Pals, 2006; McAdams & Olson, 2010; Roberts & Caspi, 2003). As described in this text, there are also different approaches to both identity and personality traits. Therefore, the sections below will describe the three-layer model of personality development that links personality traits and narrative identity, and models that focus more on how identity commitments – a process within the identity status approach – are linked to personality traits.

## The Three-Layer Model of Personality

Within the model that links personality traits and narrative identity, *three layers of personality* have been employed to describe a “conceptual itinerary for the development of personality over the human life course” (McAdams, 2019, p.8). This model involves personality traits, characteristic adaptations, and narrative identity. In this model, each of these layers follows a structure of development over time (McAdams, 2013, 2015; McAdams & Pals, 2006; McAdams & Olson, 2010).

- *Personality traits.* The first layer of personality development to emerge, personality traits (previously described in this text), refers to features of psychological individuality with regard to behavior, thoughts, and feelings, with some consistency over time (John et al., 2008). This first layer of the personality emerges already in infancy, when the child begins to act in their social arena. For instance, the self-regulatory processes of ego resiliency and ego control, described previously, can be found as personality traits in early childhood (Block, 2002). Moreover, indicators of individual variations with regard to personality in early childhood are also often referred to as temperament dimensions (McAdams & Olson, 2010). These temperament dimensions involve, for example, the child’s activity level, sociability, negative emotionality, and persistence (De Pauw & Mervielde,

2010), and also resemble traits such as extraversion, neuroticism, and conscientiousness, which are part of the Big Five (Soto & Tackett, 2015).

- *Characteristic adaptations.* The second layer of personality development – characteristic adaptations – includes aspects of individual variation with regard to motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental adaptations, such as goals, values, schemas, and self-images (McAdams & Pals, 2006). In relation to the personality traits, characteristic adaptations can be viewed as the *doing* rather than the *having* side of personality (Cantor, 1990; Lilgendahl, 2015). Around the third to fourth year of age, children develop an understanding of motivation in terms of their own and others' motivation (McAdams, 2019). Around the age of seven to eight, children have developed clear goals and aspirations, and have become motivated agents in their lives (McAdams 2019; McAdams & Olson, 2010).
- *Narrative identity.* The third layer of personality development starts to develop in adolescence and involves the construction of the narrative identity and the life story (described previously). This layer of the personality concerns the individual as an autobiographical author (McAdam, 2013). The narrative identity integrates the past with the present and the imagined future. This part of the personality concerns the more unique parts of an individual; what gives that person meaning (McAdams & Pals, 2006). To create this meaning, the autobiographical author uses memories of experiences in the past to draw conclusions about themselves (McAdams, 2013).

The three layers of this model of personality development thus start to develop in different parts of life, and throughout life each layer is added onto the other. Starting with the personality traits, or temperaments, in early childhood, the characteristic adaptations from around age five, and the life story from around age 15, all layers are part of an individual's personality and continue to develop over time (McAdam, 2013, 2015, 2019; McAdams & Pals, 2006; McAdams & Olson, 2010). Research examining the layers that involve personality traits and narrative identity have found relations between narrative processes and the Big Five traits (Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011). Findings from this research suggest relations between narrating experiences positively and negative associations with neuroticism, and positive associations between openness and narrating self-growth from negative experiences. Furthermore, research on difficult life experiences has also found that the trait of openness, and narrative processes involving exploring the impact of the experience on one's identity, separately predicted increased personal growth between the ages of 43 and 61 (Lilgendahl, Helson, & John, 2013). Research thus suggests

that there are important relations between personality traits and narrative identity, part of the three-layer model of personality, but also that these two parts independently can shed light on important aspects of psychological development.

## Personality and Identity Commitments

The cumulative continuity model of personality development also links identity and personality traits (Roberts & Caspi, 2003). This model takes into account how identity commitments, one of the aspects of the identity status approach, are related to personality traits. In this model, identity is described as one of the parts that are connected to both trait stability and trait change. In this theory, committing to and maintaining an identity over time is an aspect of both continuity and change in personality. For example, individuals whose commitments to work provide an environment that matches their personality traits will maintain their personality as they are provided with the opportunity to continue behaving and acting in line with their initial traits. An outgoing person who chooses a work with an environment where he or she is more social will continue to act in a more outgoing way, which provides the opportunity to maintain behavior that fits with characteristics of an extraverted person (Lilgendahl, 2015).

Experiences in life, such as those connected to the identity involving new roles and at work and in the family context can also provide opportunities for trait change (Roberts & Caspi, 2003). For example, research has found that investment in adult roles predicted increases in ego resiliency across early adulthood (Pals, 1999). The social investment theory highlights the importance of investment and commitments within adult roles and personality development (Roberts et al., 2005). This theory suggests that when people in early adulthood invest themselves in their new adult roles there are expectations both from the individual, and in the social context on how to act in these roles and individuals are rewarded (or punished) by others for doing so, which can have bearing on personality changes in accordance with traits that are more suitable for adult roles (i.e., becoming more agreeable, conscientious, and emotionally stable; Roberts et al., 2005). That is, this model proposes that commitments to roles in areas important for the identity, such as work, marriage, and family, lead to change in personality traits (Roberts et al., 2005). Cross-cultural research on social investment theory has found evidence for this personal maturation during early adulthood (Bleidorn et al., 2013). Interestingly, this study found that the transition to work was more important for maturation than family role transitions were. Furthermore, a study on the transition to parenthood found no association with change in the Big Five dimensions, indicating little

support for the social investment principle (van Scheppingen et al., 2016). Reviewing the research on personality change in response to life events it was found that first romantic relationship and the transition from school to college or work were related to positive changes for the personality (Bleidorn, Hopwood, & Lucas, 2018). The authors of that study also concluded that there is more research needed to understand how experiences in life, such as those involving parts of the identity, influence personality development.

The few studies that have examined relations between personality and the identity status approach have mainly focused on adolescence (Hatano, Sugimura, & Klimstra, 2017; Klimstra, 2013; Klimstra, Luyckx, Germeijs, Meeus, & Goossens, 2012; Luyckx, Soenens, & Goossens, 2006; Luyckx, Teppers, Klimstra, & Rassart, 2014). For example, a study from late adolescence found positive relations between interpersonal identity processes (such as high levels of commitment and in-depth exploration with little reconsideration) and agreeableness and conscientiousness, with negative relations to neuroticism (Klimstra et al., 2013). Furthermore, research has also found relations between personality types with characteristics similar to ego resiliency and ego control, and identity development processes in adolescence (Luyckx et al., 2014). Individuals within the resilient type showed associations to commitment processes and exploration, whereas overcontrollers (similar to high ego control) showed high ruminative exploration, and low identification with commitments. These studies show that there are relations between personality and identity development in adolescence. But, there are also some studies that have focused on relations between identity and personality in adulthood (see, e.g., Helson & Srivastava, 2001). Research in this area has shown that, across the development in adulthood, personality styles in early adulthood involving more adaptive characteristics were associated with consistently high identity achievement status (exploration processes followed by commitments; Fadjukoff, Feldt, Kokko, & Pulkkinen, 2019). Taken together, these mentioned studies suggest that there are important associations between personality characteristics and identity development. Previous research also indicates that adaptive personality characteristics, or traits, may facilitate identity development processes such as exploration and commitments, but more research is needed to understand how personality traits might influence identity development in early adulthood.

## SUMMARY OF THE STUDIES

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The overall aim of the three studies of this thesis was to investigate the development into early adulthood, focusing on identity and personality development. The first study investigates personality development from childhood to early adulthood, and associations between personality development and adult adaptation. In order to examine the personality development of ego resiliency and ego control between ages two and 33, both rank-order stability and mean-level change were investigated. The growth models for ego resiliency and ego control found in the examinations of mean-level change were then examined in relation to outcomes in adulthood at age 33 (identity development, well-being, and Big Five traits). Associations between ego resiliency and ego control at each measurement point between ages two and 33 were also examined through correlational analyses, in order to investigate proximal and distal associations between these two meta-traits and outcomes in adulthood (age 33).

The second study examines identity development in early adulthood. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study first examined the identity status development across ages 25, 29, and 33. In this part, identity status change and stability were examined at group level, as were typical and atypical patterns of individual stability and change in identity status. Then, to understand which processes are part of the identity development within the stable patterns and shed light on how people maintain their sense of identity, longitudinal qualitative analyses of identity status interviews from ages 29 and 33 were employed.

The third study investigates identity narratives of difficult experiences among early adults (age 33). Emotional sequences of narratives of difficult experiences were examined through an inductive coding process. Furthermore, frequencies of the emotional sequences were examined, as were the sequences' associations with well-being. Perceived positive or negative impacts of the narrated event on the identity were also coded and examined in relation to the emotional sequences, as were the associations between impact on the identity and well-being. As all three studies in this thesis were part of the same longitudinal project, this project will be briefly described below, followed by a short summary of the results from each study.

# The Gothenburg Longitudinal Study of Development (GoLD)

The three studies of this thesis are part of a longitudinal study started by Michael Lamb and Philip Hwang (see, e.g., Lamb, Hwang, Bookstein, Broberg, Hult, & Frodi, 1988) in 1982, the Gothenburg Longitudinal Study of Development (GoLD). At the onset of the study, 144 families were recruited from waiting lists for public childcare facilities in Gothenburg, the second largest city in Sweden. The study included families from all social strata living in the Gothenburg region, and was considered to represent families in Gothenburg (Broberg, 1989). The participants were one to two years old when the study began, and since then there have been ten waves of data collection, with each earlier wave including more than one visit. The retention rate in this longitudinal study has been remarkably high (82-95%). The studies that make up this thesis include data collected from Wave 2 (age two) up to Wave 10 (age 33). Study I employs data from nine measurement points in the GoLD study: Wave 2 (age 2), Wave 3 (age 3), Wave 4 (age 7), Wave 5 (age 8), Wave 6 (age 15), Wave 7 (age 21), Wave 8 (age 25), Wave 9 (age 29), and Wave 10 (age 33). Study II uses data from Waves 8, 9, and 10 (ages 25, 29 and 33), and Study III uses data from Wave 10 (age 33).

## Study I

### Aim

The aim of this study was to explore the developmental course and implications of ego resiliency and ego control from age two to 33 by: 1) examining the rank-order stability and 2) the mean-level change in ego resiliency and ego control from age two to 33; and 3) exploring correlations between levels and change in ego resiliency and ego control and age 33 outcomes.

### Method

#### Participants

This study concerned nine waves of the longitudinal GoLD study, the second to the tenth. For simplicity, in the present study the waves have been renamed such that the second wave (when the personality measures were first employed in the longitudinal study) is referred to as the first and so forth, up to the last

wave, which in this study was renamed the ninth. In the first waves up to age 15 (Wave 5) the participants' mothers rated their personality, and from age 21 (Wave 6) the participants rated themselves: Wave 1 ( $M_{age} = 2.3$ ,  $SD = 0.24$ ,  $N = 138$ ), Wave 2 ( $M_{age} = 3.3$ ,  $SD = 0.25$ ,  $N = 133$ ), Wave 3 ( $M_{age} = 6.7$ ,  $SD = 0.27$ ,  $N = 122$ ), Wave 4 ( $M_{age} = 8.4$ ,  $SD = 0.29$ ,  $N = 109$ ), Wave 5 ( $M_{age} = 15.2$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ,  $N = 118$ ), Wave 6 ( $M_{age} = 21.2$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ,  $N = 128$ ), Wave 7 ( $M_{age} = 24.9$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ,  $N = 135$ ), Wave 8 ( $M_{age} = 29.3$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ,  $N = 123$ ), and Wave 9 ( $M_{age} = 33.3$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ,  $N = 123$ ).

## Measures

To create scales for the personality constructs of ego resiliency and ego control (Block & Block, 1980a), we used Block and Block's (1980b) California Child Q-set (CCQ) and previously published and validated Q-sort item lists. The CCQ is a Q-sort instrument used for studying personality with descriptive personality statements on individual cards, which participants arrange from one (least characteristic) to nine (most characteristic). Scales for ego resiliency and ego control were created based on the prototypes described by Block (2008) and defined using CCQ items. The 13 items most positively and the 13 items most negatively (reversed items) related to assessing the constructs were used to create these scales, resulting in 26 items per scale. Cronbach's alpha for these scales was consistently over .70 at all ages, ranging from .71 (age 29) to .86 (age 15). As it was deemed potentially problematic to measure these constructs based solely on markers for ego resiliency and ego control either during childhood, adolescence, or adulthood, two additional scales were created for ego resiliency and two for ego control (six scales in total). The Child-Adolescent Ego Resiliency Scale with 23 items and the Child-Adolescent Ego Control Scale with 19 items were derived from the study by Eisenberg et al. (1996). Eisenberg et al. (1996) also based their scales on CCQ items that highly represent ego resiliency and ego control, and these scales have later been employed to measure resiliency and regulation among children and adolescents (Eisenberg et al., 2003; Eisenberg et al., 2004; Martel et al., 2007; Taylor, Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Widaman, 2013). The adult ego resiliency and ego control scales were constructed based on work using the California Adult Q-set (CAQ; see Letzring et al., 2005), as the CCQ represents an age-appropriate modification of the CAQ (Kremen & Block, 1998). Therefore, to create adult ego resiliency and ego control scales, items in the scales used in Eisenberg et al. (1996) with additional emotionality Q-sort items, which had been removed for the specific purpose of their study, were compared to items based on the CAQ in the scales presented in Letzring et al. (2005). Items for the Adult Ego Resiliency Scale (14 items) and the Adult Ego Control Scale (14 items) were selected based on how well they matched the adult scale items. All scales were subsequently used



to test the robustness of the findings, and the prototype scales for ego resiliency and ego control, based on Block (2008), were used for the main analyses.

A Swedish version (Zakrisson, 2010) of the Big Five Inventory (John et al., 2008) was also used to measure the Big Five personality traits at age 33. This instrument assesses the trait dimensions of extraversion, agreeableness, openness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness.

Well-being at age 33 was measured using three different scales: the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWL; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) measuring global satisfaction with life, the Single-Item Self-Esteem Scale (SISE; Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001), and the Brief Symptom Inventory 18 (BSI-18; Derogatis, 2001) measuring psychological distress.

To measure global identity development, and identity development in the domains of occupation, romantic relationships, parenthood, and work/family priorities, the Ego Identity Status Interview (Marcia, 1966; Marcia, et al., 1993) was used (see Study II). In this study, past and ongoing exploration as well as commitment identity processes were assessed on a continuous scale ranging from 1 (does not represent identity development) to 5 (completely represents identity development).

### Data Analysis

Four steps of analysis were conducted, starting with rank-order stability using Pearson's correlations to investigate the associations between proximal and distal waves for ego resiliency and ego control, separately. Second, latent growth curve models (McArdle, 2009) were used to examine mean-level stability and change in ego resiliency and ego control from age two (Wave 1) to 33 (Wave 9). Third, with growth models from the second step, variability in the intercepts and slopes for ego resiliency and ego control were examined with regard to their association with age 33 outcomes of well-being (SWL, SISE, and BSI), personality traits (BFI), and identity development (previous exploration, ongoing exploration, and commitment). These analyses addressed whether change across the first three decades of life and level of ego resiliency and ego control at age 33 were associated with adult adaptation. Fourth, correlational analyses were performed to investigate the predictive value of ego resiliency and ego control. These analyses examined associations between ego resiliency and ego control, respectively, at each age starting from childhood, and well-being, personality traits, and identity development at age 33.

### Main Findings

For ego resiliency and ego control, the rank-order stability of proximal waves was high ( $r_s > .63$  for ego resiliency except ratings between ages 15 and 21,

when the rater changed from parent to participant, and  $r_s > .52$  for ego control). Rank-order stability was also found between distal waves for both ego resiliency and ego control. For ego resiliency the lowest associations was found between age two and 25,  $r = .13$ . For ego control associations was low between early childhood and adolescence, as well as early adulthood (with lowest associations between age two and 25,  $r = -.06$ ) but from age seven rank-order stability increased between distal waves with the lowest associations between age seven and 21,  $r = .26$ . Together, these findings indicate high personality consistency from childhood to early adulthood.

Mean level changes in ego resiliency development from childhood to early adulthood followed a negative linear development, indicating a high level of resiliency at age two with a small, gradual decrease in the following years up to age 33, still indicating values of fairly high ego resiliency. Ego control followed a quadratic growth model from less ego control to more ego control: starting at age two below the midpoint of the scale, followed by a quite rapid increase into adolescence and then a subsequent leveling off into early adulthood.

Building on these growth models for ego resiliency and ego control, we examined how the growth parameters (intercept and slopes) were associated with age 33 psychological outcomes (well-being, the Big Five personality traits, and identity development). In these models, the intercept of the growth model was specified at the end of the developmental process, age 33, examining how the variability in the level of ego resiliency/ego control at age 33 was related to age 33 outcomes. The slope refers to the rate of change; thus, we investigated how the variability in change was related to positive outcomes in early adulthood. Results showed that none of the models examining associations between ego resiliency and ego control, and identity development were statistically significant. Associations were found for ego resiliency, with the intercept at age 33 being associated with well-being (positively for self-esteem and life satisfaction, and negatively for psychological distress), whereas the linear slope was only positively related to life satisfaction. Thus, more change in ego resiliency was related to higher life satisfaction. However, adding the Big Five traits to this model reduced all these associations to non-significance. This indicates that there might be an indirect relation to well-being through lower-order traits for ego resiliency. The only growth parameter associated with psychological functioning for ego control was the small negative association between the intercept and self-esteem, which held when the Big Five traits were added to the model. Thus, higher ego control was directly related to lower self-esteem at age 33.

Analyses with ego resiliency as an early predictor for well-being showed that ego resiliency was associated with well-being at age 33 (positively for self-

esteem and life satisfaction, and negatively for psychological distress). These associations were evident from childhood, and became more prominent from age 21 and remained so through adulthood. The ego control results showed that there were correlations with well-being at age 33. These associations were found from age 15 to age 33, and were negative for self-esteem, with additional negative associations for life satisfaction at age 33. Correlations between ego resiliency and age 33 Big Five traits showed a steady increase in strength of the positive correlations for extraversion and conscientiousness. Neuroticism showed an increase in negative correlations from age 15 to 21, when the rater of ego resiliency changed from the participants' mothers to the participants themselves. For ego control and associations with age 33 Big Five traits, there were negative associations from age 15 with extraversion, which increased in strength to a very strong negative association between ego control at age 33 and extraversion at age 33. There was also a positive association between ego control and neuroticism from age 15 through adulthood. Analyses of ego resiliency and associations with identity development at age 33 showed positive relations between ego resiliency and previous exploration, as well as commitment. These associations were most prominent in adolescence (and some small associations were also found in childhood) when the participants' mothers rated their personality, and were positive for commitments within global identity, occupation, romance and work/family priorities. Ego resiliency in adolescence was also positively associated with previous exploration within global identity, occupation, and the work/family priorities domain.

For ego control and identity development at age 33, there were small negative correlations in childhood and/or adolescence between ego control (rated by the participants' mothers) and commitment within global identity, romance, parenthood, and the priorities domain. Thus, Study I showed relations with positive adult adaptation for ego resiliency and ego control, and that these associations can be found already in childhood.

## Study II

### Aim

The aim of this study was to investigate identity development across early adulthood. First, patterns of identity status change and stability across early adulthood (ages 25, 29, and 33) were examined (Study A). This first study was followed by a second study (Study B) aiming to answer the question: Which processes of identity development from age 29 to 33 can be identified among

individuals with established identity commitments and stable identity status across early adulthood?

## Method

### Participants

Participants were part of the longitudinal GoLD study. Study A includes those participants who took part in Waves 8 (age 25,  $M_{age} = 24.9$ ,  $SD = 0.7$ ), 9 (age 29,  $M_{age} = 29.3$ ,  $SD = 0.6$ ), and 10 (age 33,  $M_{age} = 33.3$ ,  $SD = 0.5$ ),  $N=118$ , and for Study B, 45 of these participants were included in the qualitative analyses. Descriptive data and analyses of changes in the participants' development in the contexts of love and work across the three waves ( $N=118$ ) showed changes in occupational status, with fewer participants studying and more working after post-secondary education at ages 29 and 33 compared to age 25. There were also changes in family life, with more participants being in a romantic relationship, cohabiting with a partner, and having or expecting children at ages 29 and 33 than at age 25. We also found more participants cohabiting with a partner and having or expecting children at age 33 than at age 29.

### Measures

A structured background interview was performed at all time points, and included questions about the participants' romantic relationships, living situation, education, and current occupational status, as well as whether they had or were expecting children.

Marcia's Ego Identity Status Interview (Marcia et al., 1993) was also conducted by trained interviewers with the participants at all three time points. The identity domains explored in the interviews were occupation, romantic relationships, parenthood, and work/family priorities. The interviews thus provide rich material that can be used for in-depth qualitative analyses as well as for assessing global identity status. Based on their exploration of alternatives and their commitment to chosen directions, participants were assigned a global identity status (identity achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, or identity diffusion). This status was based on the four domains in which participants were asked about their explorations and commitments. Five guidelines were used in coding global status, in line with what Marcia and colleagues (1993) proposed, and in cases in which there was no complete congruence across domains, five aspects were included: (1) identity status in the area considered most personally important to the respondent; (2) the most easily recognized status in any domain; (3) whether moratorium or identity achievement is present in any domain, as this is evidence of the individual's ability to explore alternatives; (4) which identity status is present in the largest number of domains; and (5) the

impression of the person interviewing the participant, as identity status assessment is a clinical judgement task.

### Data Analysis

An explanatory mixed-methods design (Nastasi, Hitchcock, & Brown, 2010) was employed in Study II. In this sequential design, Study A was first conducted and its results were then used to inform the aim and sample of Study B (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013).

Study A: First, a variable-centered approach was employed to examine group-level stability and change in identity status across waves, using Cochran's Q test (Siegel & Castellan, 1988), followed by a post-hoc McNemar test for significance of change. Second, a person-centered approach was used to investigate typical and atypical patterns of individual stability and change in identity status between adjacent time points (ages 25 and 29, and ages 29 and 33) with the cross-tabulation procedure EXACON (Bergman, Magnusson, & El-Khoury, 2003). Chi-square analyses were also applied to analyze gender differences within the identity statuses.

Study B: Based on the findings from individual trajectories in Study A, we decided to examine patterns of stability that involved established commitments (i.e., identity achievement and foreclosure) at all three time points. Therefore, the 45 participants who were stable in identity achievement or foreclosure across ages 25, 29, and 33 were subjected to qualitative analyses. The aim of these analyses was to examine potential underlying processes for maintaining a sense of identity from age 29 to 33. The decision to examine the development from age 29 to 33 was based not only on the findings of high status stability but also on the demographic analyses of participants' change in the contexts of love and work. These analyses indicated that many had made transitions into adult roles by age 33, which has been highlighted as a developmental phase involving establishing oneself in important life areas (Mehta et al., 2020). As there is little knowledge about developmental processes in this phase of life (Mehta et al., 2020), and as previous research has shown that the identity status model does not capture processes involved in how people maintain their identity (Carlsson et al., 2015; Kroger, 2002), the qualitative analyses focused on development from age 29 to 33.

The interviews from each participant at ages 29 and 33 were treated as individual case studies and were examined through longitudinal qualitative case-based methodology (Yin, 2014). To capture individual development between time points, differences and similarities between each participant's interviews from ages 29 and 33 were summarized. These case summaries were then used for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in order to investigate processes

of identity development between ages 29 and 33. In the thematic analysis, elements of identity change and stability were treated as codes. A total of 15 participants' case summaries were used to develop the codebook and coding scheme for a model with three main themes, each describing processes of identity development with deepening or weakening development. In the coding scheme, each of the three processes in the model was divided into three scale steps: deepening, middle, and weakening (see Figure 1). Reliability was tested with a random sample of case summaries ( $n = 20$ ) using intraclass correlations (ICC), and was found to be acceptable for all three processes: *approach to change*, ICC = .88 with 95% confidence interval = 0.70-0.95; *story integration*, ICC = .88 with 95% confidence interval = 0.70-0.95; and *participation in a broader life context*, ICC = .79 with 95% confidence interval = 0.49-0.92.

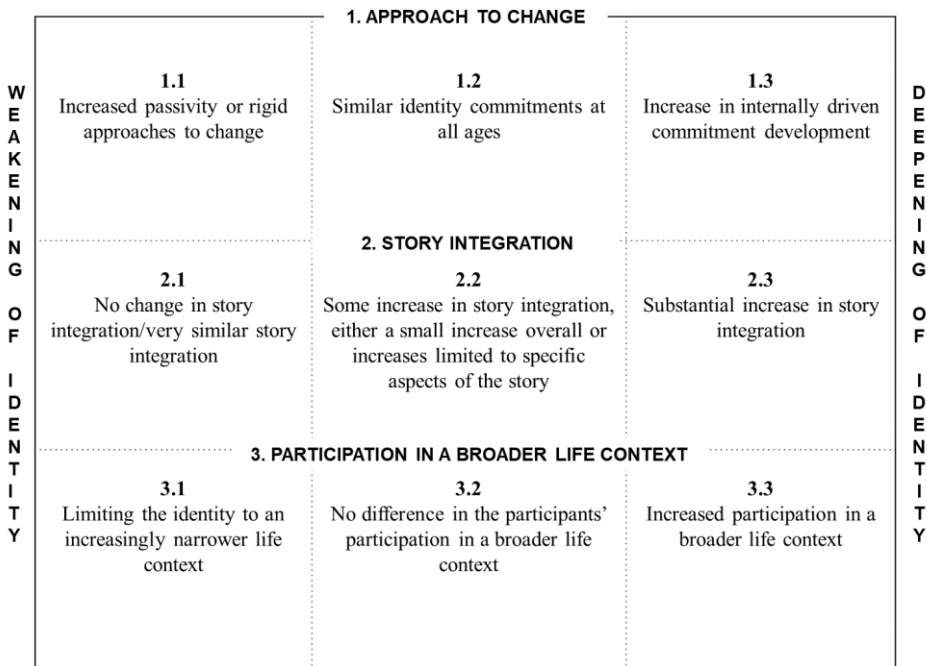


Figure 1. The coding scheme summarizes the three scale steps of identity development among individuals with established identity commitments and stable identity status across early adulthood.

## Main Findings

Study A: Group-level changes through early adulthood were found in identity achievement and moratorium, with more individuals in identity achievement and fewer in moratorium. At ages 25 and 29, more women than men were coded to identity achievement, and more men than women were coded to identity diffusion. No gender differences were found at age 33. Regarding individual patterns of identity status change and stability across early adulthood, the most common pattern was stability in either identity achievement ( $n = 25$ ) or foreclosure ( $n = 20$ ).

Study B: Findings from the qualitative analyses of the 45 participants coded to the same committed status across early adulthood (at ages 25, 29, and 33) resulted in a model with three processes: *approach to change*, *story integration*, and *participation in a broader life context*. In this model, each process represents core aspects of the participants' identity development on a continuum between two endpoints. The deepening endpoint reflects a richer, more integrated, yet flexible narrative that has evolved, while the weakening endpoint reflects a shallower, firmer, more closed identity narrative that has not evolved across the interview occasions. Below are descriptions of the main themes of each of the three identity processes. *Approach to change* concerns the participants' approach to change in relation to their previously established identity commitments, reflecting their willingness or resistance to continuously evaluate their commitments. *Story integration* concerns the development of temporal integration (i.e., integration of the past, present, and future) and thematic integration (i.e., the ways content is integrated to emphasize the overall theme). *Participation in a broader life context* concerns the participants' development of their ways of relating to society, generations, historical time, and other aspects that expand beyond the individual. It concerns taking part, or limiting oneself, in terms of participation beyond the personal context. As Figure 2 illustrates, all but four of the participants coded to identity achievement at ages 25, 29, and 33 were coded to the deepening or middle part of the model on all three processes. Individuals coded to foreclosure at all three ages were spread more evenly across the entire model for all three processes, some more towards deepening and some towards weakening.

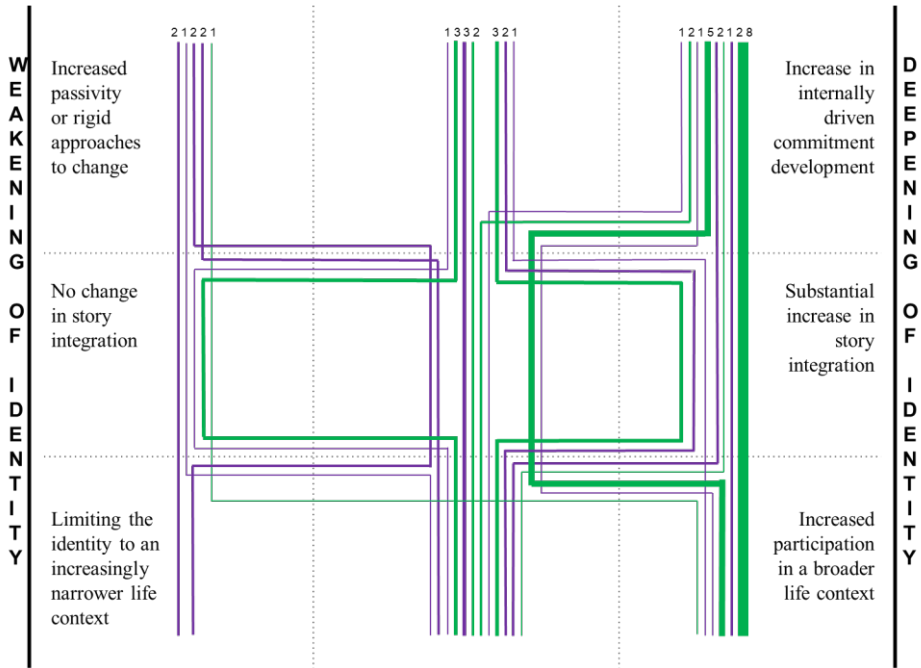


Figure 2. The 20 developmental patterns found across the model of identity development among individuals with established identity commitments and stable identity status across early adulthood. The numbers at the top of the bars indicate the number of participants following a specific pattern. The green bars represent participants assigned to identity achievement at all ages, and the purple bars represent participants assigned to foreclosure at all ages.

The findings in Study II thus show that across early adulthood people mature with regard to identity status development, and that there is high stability within individual patterns. The findings also demonstrate that people continue to develop their identities in early adulthood through three processes: approach to change, story integration, and participation in a broader life context. Within this continued identity development, exploration before establishing commitments appears to provide a good foundation for further identity deepening, while establishing commitments without previous exploration was connected to weakening or deepening identity development.



## Study III

### Aim

The aim of this study was to investigate identity narratives of difficult experiences among early adults in Sweden, and then to examine relations between these narrative patterns and well-being. We therefore investigated (1) the emotional sequences of narratives of difficult experiences, employing an inductive coding process; and (2) the relations between emotional sequencing and a) well-being and b) impact on the identity.

### Method

#### Participants

This study concerned Wave 10 in the longitudinal GoLD study when participants were 33 years old. This wave involved 124 participants, of whom six did not provide a narrative. Subsequently, the total sample was 116 participants: 58 women and 58 men, aged from 32 to 34 years ( $M_{age} = 33.28$ ,  $SD = .54$ ).

#### Measures

For narrative identity, we used an adaptation of the “Challenges” prompt from the Life Story Interview (McAdams, 2008) and asked participants “When you look back over your entire life, what is the most difficult experience, or one of the most difficult events, that you have faced in your life?”, with follow-up questions such as “Can you describe it?” and “How do you think this has affected you?”

Well-being at age 33 was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWL; Diener et al., 1985) and the Brief Symptom Inventory 18 (BSI-18; Derogatis, 2001), described in Study I.

To capture perceived positive impact on the identity, this was examined using a previously established codebook by Pals (2006a). As negative impact was also found in the narratives, the name was changed from the original measure’s positive *growth* to *impact* on the identity. Thus, the original positive growth codebook was adjusted to capture negative impact as well. Reliability was acceptable for positive impact (*intra*class  $r = .96$ ), and negative impact (*intra*class  $r = .96$ ).

#### Data Analysis

First, to capture how people frame difficult experiences, we examined the emotional sequences of the narratives with an inductive data-driven *bottom-up pro-*

cess (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Syed & Nelson, 2015). Transcripts of the narratives (in the original Swedish) were first read closely using 20 narratives (by random choice) for this initial analysis. Reliability was acceptable for emotional sequences (*overall kappa* = .80; *neutral/vague kappa* = .78; combination of positive and negative *kappa* = .83; *redemptive kappa* = .74; *negative kappa* = .86). All narratives were then coded according to these four categories. Then, chi-square goodness of fit was used to test differences regarding the distribution of emotional sequences in the full sample of narratives. To examine whether these common ways of narrating difficult experiences were related to well-being, statistical analyses were performed using one-way ANOVAs.

## Main Findings

Four emotional sequences were found in the participants' narratives of challenges: neutral/vague, combination of positive and negative, redemptive, and negative sequencing. These emotional sequences represent how individuals framed their experiences in the narrative. The neutral/vague sequencing involved narratives with more neutral emotions regarding the experience, or more vague emotions that were not elaborated. The narratives that were framed with a combination of positive and negative sequencing involved two separate emotions regarding the experience. In this type of sequencing, the narrative often involved a positive framing such as "I've gained some self-awareness", followed by a statement highlighting that it was still something bad, such as, "It was a hard time". The redemptive sequencing was represented by narratives of the difficult experiences that were framed in a positive way, such as something good having come out of the experience, sometimes expressed as a new insight. Narratives with negative sequencing were framed in a solely negative way. Chi-square goodness of fit showed equal expected values across the four emotional sequences, indicating that the emotional sequences were equally common.

Analyses with one-way ANOVAs showed associations between emotional sequences and life satisfaction (SWL) and psychological distress (BSI-18). These analyses showed that participants with redemptive sequencing scored higher on life satisfaction than those with negative sequencing. There were no differences in scores for life satisfaction between the redemptive, the combination of positive and negative, and the neutral/vague sequencing. Furthermore, the participants with neutral/vague sequencing displayed lower psychological distress than those with negative sequencing. Again, there were no significant differences between the other emotional sequences. Together, these analyses showed that negative sequencing was related to less well-being, but

there was no difference in relation to well-being for the other three emotional sequences.

Analyses with one-way ANOVAs were also performed examining associations between emotional sequencing and positive impact on the identity. Positive impact involved how the participants evaluated their experience in terms of self-change and whether they exhibited positive growth, or development, in their evaluation of the experience. Analyses showed that redemptive sequencing and a combination of positive and negative sequencing had higher levels of positive impact compared to narratives with neutral/vague and negative sequencing. There were no differences between narratives with redemptive sequencing and those with a combination of positive and negative sequencing. Negative impact on the identity was also examined in relation to emotional sequencing, and concerned how participants evaluated their experience with regard to negative self-change connected to their experience. These analyses showed that narratives with a combination of positive and negative sequencing and neutral/vague sequencing displayed lower levels of negative impact than negative emotional sequencing. Redemptive sequencing involved no negative impact. Taken together, these analyses showed that redemptive sequencing and a combination of positive and negative sequencing were associated with more positive impact than the other sequences, and that negative sequencing was associated with more negative impact.

Correlations between positive impact and well-being showed positive relations to life satisfaction. Negative impact was positively associated with psychological distress, and showed negative relations to life satisfaction. This suggests that people who expressed more negative self-change in their identity narratives seemed to experience less well-being, and that those who expressed more positive impact from difficult experiences seemed to experience more positive aspects of well-being in their lives.

Study III shows that, in Sweden, the emotional sequencing of identity narratives of difficult experiences is narrated through four equally common emotional sequences. Apart from the negative sequencing, the three other emotional sequences – redemptive, neutral/vague, and a combination of positive and negative – were similarly associated with psychological well-being.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

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The overall aim of this thesis was to investigate the development into early adulthood, focusing on identity and personality development. The first study investigates personality development from childhood (starting from age two) to early adulthood (age 33), and associations between personality development and adult adaptation (age 33). The second study examines identity development in early adulthood with three measurement points (ages 25, 29, and 33), with a special focus on the development from age 29 to 33. The third study investigates cultural framework for telling identity narratives of difficult experiences among early adults (age 33) in Sweden, and relations between the narrative patterns found and well-being. Findings from these three studies will be discussed below, starting with personality development from childhood to early adulthood and followed by identity development in early adulthood and identity narratives of difficult experiences in the Swedish context. The last part of the discussion includes a theoretical and methodological discussion.

### Personality Development from Age 2 to 33

The results in Study I on personality development showed that the meta-traits ego resiliency, which involve the individual's ability to adjust and adapt to the immediate situation and ego control, which concern the individual's ability to inhibit impulses and constrain actions or emotions, are fairly stable personality characteristics over the first three decades of life. Findings showed that there was more consistency in ego resilience and ego control between adjacent waves than more distal waves, as indicated by the rank-order stability. For ego resiliency the lowest correlation found was between age two and 25 and was .13, thus demonstrating some stability also over this long period of time. Similarly, results also showed that ego control displayed rank-order stability across more distal waves, but these results were evident from age seven and onwards (with correlations above .26). Indeed, previous research has found rank-order stability between adjacent and distal waves for ego resiliency and ego control from age three to 23 (with the exception of associations between childhood and age eleven to 23 ego resiliency for girls; Block & Block, 2006).

With regard to the cumulative continuity principle, which states that personality becomes more stable over time (Caspi et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2008), findings in Study I showed that apart from a drop in rank-order stability between age 15 and 21 for ego resiliency (i.e., when the rater changed from the participants' mothers to the participants themselves) rank-order stability between adjacent waves did not substantially increase in adulthood compared to the stability found between adjacent waves in childhood. Interestingly, ego control did not show this drop in rank-order stability between age 15 and 21 when the rater changed, and although rank-order stability was high in early adulthood, findings at younger ages for ego control also indicated high stability. Thus, in general both ego resiliency and ego control showed high consistency from childhood to adulthood.

Furthermore, the results from developmental trajectories (i.e., growth curves), showed a development towards more ego control from childhood to adolescence, with a leveling off in emerging adulthood. This increase thus involved a maturation of ego control, showing that the ability to inhibit impulses and spontaneous behavior increased over time. Similar trends of maturation have been found in relation to research involving the Big Five traits, such as an increase in agreeableness and conscientiousness, and a decline in neuroticism (Costa et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2006), also known as the maturity principle (Caspi et al., 2005). However, the increase in ego control leveled off in early adulthood and the growth trajectory was best represented by a quadratic trend, indicating that ego control may decline in later parts of adulthood. As an intermediate level of ego control facilitates adaptation in life (Block & Block, 2006; Denissen et al., 2008), a small decline in ego control may not contradict the notion of maturation.

In contrast to ego control, in Study I ego resiliency was instead found to decrease from childhood to adulthood. This decrease was very small, however, and in early adulthood the ego resiliency levels were still fairly high. As ego resiliency involves the ability to flexibly adjust to environments, this can also be seen as a personality trait that could be expected to mature over time in line with the maturity principle (Caspi et al., 2005). Longitudinal studies examining ego resiliency have found this maturity and increase over time. For example, Alessandri and colleagues (2016) found a high stability of ego resiliency from age 15 until the end of high school, which was then followed by a relative increase in ego resiliency to age 25. Taken together, the results in Study I showed that ego control and ego resiliency display stability over time, indicating that these meta-traits represent fairly stable characteristics of an individual's personality.

## Ego Resiliency and Ego Control, and the Big Five Traits

Study I examined ego resiliency and ego control as meta-traits above the Big Five traits. Thus, in Study I lower-order traits were represented by extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. Findings in Study I showed that higher ego resiliency was associated with more extraversion and conscientiousness, and lower levels of neuroticism. Other studies have found similar results (Asendorpf et al., 2001; Huey & Weisz, 1997; Letzring et al., 2005), which has also been confirmed in a meta-analysis examining different measures of ego resilience (Oshio, Taku, Hirano, & Saeed, 2018). This indicates that ego resiliency is related to the Big Five traits, which have been referred to as part of the more mature traits (see Oshio et al., 2018). Furthermore, Study I also showed that these relations between ego resiliency and Big Five traits in early adulthood could be found from around age seven, and that correlations became stronger closer to early adulthood. In line with previous research, Study I thus shows that ego resiliency is associated with Big Five traits that involve being more dependable and more emotionally adjusted, combined with being more extraverted.

It is more problematic to discuss associations between ego control and Big Five traits, as neither high nor low levels of ego control are considered to be adaptive; rather, moderate levels are optimal (Block, 2002; Block & Block, 2006). However, similar to previous studies (Huey & Weisz, 1997; Letzring et al., 2005), findings in Study I suggest that from adolescence (age 15) and onward, higher ego control is associated with lower levels of extraversion in early adulthood (age 33), which indicates that low ego control is associated with being more extraverted. Characteristics of an extraverted person fit into this concept of how the regulating process of ego control may be viewed in behavior, as people with low ego control can be described as socially skilled and charming (Letzring et al., 2005).

In contrast to previous findings showing positive relations between low ego control and neuroticism (Letzring et al., 2005), Study I showed that higher ego control was related to higher levels of neuroticism. However, studies among children have also found results similar to those in Study I (Asendorpf et al., 2001; Huey & Weisz, 1997), indicating that findings are not consistent across studies. Furthermore, in theory, ego control should be associated with a mix of positive and negative characteristics (Block, 2002). In some situations it is more favorable to be able to allow for more impulse expression rather than being more controlled, while in other situations it is more favorable to be more controlled. While low control is favorable for qualities such as being socially skilled, interesting, and charming, individuals with low control can also be un-

predictable and changeable in their behavior, which are less favorable characteristics (Letzring et al., 2005). Although results in Study I seem to indicate that lower ego control is mostly associated with favorable characteristics such as being more extraverted and more emotionally stable (the opposite of neuroticism), these results should be interpreted with caution. For instance, there may be missing information about variability regarding narrower representations (i.e., facets) of the Big Five traits that could shed more light on positive and negative characteristics related to ego control. Future studies could further examine the relations between ego control and facets below the Big Five traits to understand the ways in which ego control may be associated with both negative and positive personality characteristics.

In relation to other meta-traits, findings in Study I showed different associations between ego resiliency and ego control, and the Big Five traits than those regarding stability and plasticity. Ego resiliency and ego control have been discussed as being similar to the meta-traits of stability and plasticity, in that both sets are part of an adaptive system (DeYoung, 2010). It has also been suggested that ego resiliency to some degree resembles plasticity and that ego control resembles stability (DeYoung, 2010). Findings in Study I showed that higher ego resiliency was associated with more extraversion and conscientiousness and less neuroticism compared to plasticity, which involves extraversion and openness. Furthermore, results in Study I showed that higher ego control was associated with less extraversion and higher neuroticism, compared to stability, which is connected to agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (opposite of neuroticism). Findings in Study I therefore provide some evidence in support of previous suggestions that these two sets of meta-traits represent distinctly different personality systems (DeYoung, 2010; see also Chang et al., 2012). Taken together, the results in Study I show that it is valuable to consider the role of ego resiliency and ego control as meta-traits above the Big Five. Consequently, it would be fruitful for future research to examine how ego resiliency and ego control can be understood as higher-order traits in the trait taxonomy, parallel to the meta-traits of plasticity and stability.

## Meta-Traits and Well-Being in Early Adulthood

In Study I, the development of ego resiliency and ego control across the three first decades of life was examined in relation to well-being in early adulthood. As ego resiliency and ego control were examined as meta-traits above the Big Five, these five traits were also included in the analyses to determine whether the findings could be explained directly through the meta-traits, or through the lower-order traits. Findings from the analyses of associations between levels and change in ego resiliency and ego control and well-being in early adulthood

will first be discussed below, followed by their direct, or indirect, relation to well-being through the Big Five traits.

### Ego Resiliency and Ego Control and Associations with Well-being

Results in Study I from analyses using the growth parameters from the growth curve models of personality development showed that higher ego resiliency at age 33 was associated with more self-esteem and satisfaction with life, and less psychological distress. Results from the growth parameters also showed that the rate of change for ego resiliency was positively associated with life satisfaction. These findings, exhibiting positive associations between ego resiliency and outcomes in early adulthood, show some similarity to previous findings demonstrating that ego resiliency is associated with adjustment in adulthood (Bohane et al., 2017; Denissen et al., 2008), such as negatively associated with internalizing problems across early adulthood (Miloni, Alessandri, Eisenberg, Vecchione, & Caprara, 2015), and greater stress resistance in later adulthood (Ong, Bergerman, Bisconti, & Wallace, 2006). Researchers examining ego resiliency among adults and the ability to recuperate after a stressful experience have also demonstrated that individuals high on ego resiliency return more quickly to baseline in physiological response after negative emotional arousal (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

Furthermore, Study I also showed that there were distal associations between ego resiliency and well-being. The results showed that from eight years of age, higher ego resiliency was associated with more self-esteem and life satisfaction, and less psychological distress, in early adulthood. Similarly, studies have also found longitudinal relations between higher ego resiliency in childhood and positive outcomes in adulthood, such as fewer behavioral problems (Causadias et al., 2012). However, an extensive part of the research examining relations between ego resiliency and psychological health outcomes concerns younger ages. These studies show that ego resiliency can facilitate positive outcomes, such as achievement in school (Alessandri, Zuffianò, Eisenberg, & Pastorelli, 2017), relations to fewer depressive symptoms (Block & Gjerde, 1990), and fewer internalized and externalized problems in adolescence (Chuang et al., 2006). Thus, Study I not only shows that ego resiliency may facilitate positive outcomes in adulthood; it is also one of few studies to show associations between ego resiliency in childhood/adolescence and positive outcomes in adulthood. Taken together, Study I illustrates that ego resiliency can facilitate positive outcomes in adulthood in several ways.

Results in Study I, with analyses using the growth parameters from the growth curves, showed that higher ego control at age 33 was associated with less self-esteem at age 33. Furthermore, findings in Study I also showed that relations between higher ego control and less self-esteem in early adulthood



could be found from adolescence (age 15) and onwards. In a similar vein, Klimstra and colleagues (2010) found that a high level of ego control was associated with more negative aspects such as higher levels of depression among adolescents. In contrast to findings in Study I, previous studies have also found that being undercontrolled (i.e., similar to low ego control) in childhood was related to more negative emotionality in adulthood (Caspi et al., 2003). However, as previously mentioned, due to the conceptualization of this construct it is more difficult to understand what the results imply, because while high levels of ego control are not in theory considered to be optimal for an individual, neither are too-low levels. Theoretically, a moderate level of ego control and high level of ego resiliency should promote positive adaptation (Block & Block, 2006). For example, previous research has found markers of attending to adult roles earlier in individuals with high resiliency and moderate levels of ego control (Denissen et al., 2008). Meanwhile, other studies have found no effects when differentiating between different levels of ego control, including moderate levels of ego control in relation to negative aspects such as behavior problems (Causadias et al., 2012). Thus, in order to understand more about how this dynamic system of ego control and ego resiliency functions in promoting positive adaptation, future research might advance the field by studying interactions between ego resiliency and ego control to examine whether moderate levels of ego control and higher resiliency facilitate outcomes of adult adaptation.

#### Associations with Well-being Accounting for Big Five Traits

Study I showed that lower-order traits of extraversion, openness, and neuroticism, part of the Big Five traits, could account for the associations between levels (cross-sectional at age 33) and change in ego resiliency and well-being. However, for ego control, the small negative association with self-esteem in early adulthood could not be accounted for by lower-order traits (i.e., the Big Five traits). Thus, in contrast to the findings for ego resiliency, ego control seems to have some small, but direct relation to well-being outcomes in early adulthood. Similarly, studies on the meta-traits of stability and plasticity have also found direct relations beyond the Big Five traits (Hirsh, DeYoung, & Peterson, 2009).

Furthermore, research has also found that, when combined, ego resiliency and ego control in childhood predict outcomes in the early 20s better than traits (Asendorpf & Denissen, 2006). In line with this, the distal associations found in Study I between ego resiliency and ego control, and well-being in early adulthood (i.e., higher ego resiliency was correlated with more self-esteem and life satisfaction, and less psychological distress, while higher ego control was correlated with less self-esteem) suggest that these personality characteristics

can predict important outcomes in early adulthood. Thus, meta-traits such as ego resiliency and ego control, which are evident in early childhood and, as Study I also showed are fairly consistent over time, can provide significant knowledge about early personality predictors and positive outcomes in early adulthood.

Taken together, the results showed that the personality development of ego resiliency and ego control from childhood to early adulthood is important for outcomes on well-being in early adulthood. Furthermore, Study I also showed that there may be indirect associations through Big Five traits, conceptualized here as lower-order traits. This also shows that associations with different outcomes should be considered at multiple levels of the trait hierarchy, and that it may be valuable to address ego resiliency and ego control as meta-traits in the trait hierarchy.

## Ego Resiliency and Ego Control and Identity Development in Early Adulthood

Theoretically, there should be associations between personality and identity, as both can be seen as components of a broader system (McAdams & Pals, 2006; McCrae & Costa, 1996; Roberts & Caspi, 2003; Syed, 2017). Interestingly, Study I showed that associations between ego resiliency and ego control, and identity development in early adulthood (age 33) were only evident in childhood and adolescence, when the participants' mothers rated their personality. Findings in Study I showed that, in adolescence (age 15), higher ego resiliency was associated with identity development involving more commitments in early adulthood within global identity, occupation, romance, and the work/family priorities domain, and some of these associations were also found in childhood (age seven and eight). Higher ego resiliency in adolescence was also associated with having engaged in the process of exploration within global identity, occupation, and the work/family priorities domain by early adulthood. Similar associations have also been found in adolescence for the resilient personality type and identity processes involving exploration and commitments (Luyckx et al., 2014). Furthermore, findings in Study I showed that higher ego control in childhood and adolescence was associated with fewer identity commitments in early adulthood for global identity, parenthood, the priorities domain (only for ego control in childhood) and romance (only for ego control in adolescence). Thus, in line with research suggesting that young people's personalities are associated with important life outcomes (Soto & Tackett, 2015), it may be that ego resiliency and ego control are early predictors of more mature identity development in early adulthood (as indicated by the identity de-

velopment processes with previous exploration before establishing commitments, which represent the identity achieved status). However, it should be noted that in Study I, when the participants were adolescents, it was their mothers who rated ego resiliency and ego control. Thus, mothers may perceive something in their child's ego resiliency – their ability to be flexible and resilient and their ego control – and their ability to restrain impulses that in turn seems to be associated with how these youths later engage in identity exploration and commitment processes. This suggests that the way mothers perceive their child's ego resiliency and ego control can shed light on the youth's current, or future, engagement in identity development processes.

The findings in Study I indicating that beyond late childhood and adolescence there were no associations between ego resiliency and ego control and identity development in early adulthood are not in line with previous research. Although only a few studies have examined connections between personality and identity processes involving exploration and commitment, research has found relations between personality in early adulthood and identity exploration and identity commitments (Fadjukoff et al., 2019). Still, as Study I showed evidence for ego resiliency and ego control as early predictors of identity development processes in the domains of occupation and romantic relationships, areas in which life events show connections to changes in personality (Bleidorn et al., 2018), future research would profit from an examination of relations between identity development processes in these domains and their relation to ego resiliency and ego control. In fact, previous studies have shown that identity development can predict increased ego resiliency in early adulthood (Pals, 1999).

Taken together, the findings in Study I show how the meta-traits of ego resiliency and ego control develop across the three first decades of life, and their relations to outcomes in adulthood. The results show that ego resiliency and ego control demonstrate consistency across this extensive time span that involves several major transitions, and that ego control develops more in earlier parts of life. These findings are important, as there are only a few longitudinal studies examining how personality develops from childhood to early adulthood (Soto & Tackett, 2015) and as far as I know, there are no studies on stability and change in ego resiliency and ego control across these first three decades of life. Study I also contributes to the field of personality and health, where research on childhood personality and its connections to health outcomes in adulthood is a current demand (see, e.g., Angelim, Horwood, Smillie, Marrero, & Wood, 2020; Shanahan, Hill, Roberts, Eccles, & Friedman, 2014). This study showed that ego resiliency and ego control are associated with positive outcomes in early adulthood as well as with the Big Five traits, and that associations can be found already in childhood. Therefore, this study shows

that the meta-traits ego resiliency and ego control can contribute to valuable insights into the relations between personality at young ages and adult adaptation.

## Identity Status Development across Early Adulthood

Study II examined identity development in early adulthood through quantitative examinations of identity status development, followed by in-depth qualitative investigations of processes of identity development. Findings in Study II regarding global identity status development show an increase in identity achievement, and a decrease in moratorium, across early adulthood. This is in line with the progressive movements that have been suggested for identity status development over time (Waterman, 1982; 1999) and what has been found in the few longitudinal studies across adulthood (Cramer, 2004, 2017; Fadjukoff et al., 2016). Furthermore, the findings in Study II also showed that, across early adulthood, the most common individual pattern was to be coded to identity achievement (AAA) or foreclosure (FFF) at all measurement points. These results were somewhat surprising, given that earlier research has suggested that individual patterns of identity status development across adulthood would be signified by cyclic movements, such as moratorium-achievement-moratorium-achievement (MAMA cycles; Stephen et al., 1992) or foreclosure-achievement-foreclosure-achievement (FAFA cycles; Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2000). However, as MAMA or FAFA cycle movements are assumed to be likely if there is a disruptive event of some kind that leads the individual to regress to an earlier identity structure (Marcia, 2002; Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2000), it could be that the findings of stability in the committed statuses in Study II reflect few disruptive experiences in people's lives across early adulthood. MAMA or FAFA cycles could also have been difficult to detect in Study II, due to the four years between measurement points. However, similarly to Study II, previous research from late adolescence to early adulthood has also found that high stability is common within the committed statuses (Kroger et al., 2010). Thus, despite the notion that identity development continues across adulthood (Erikson, 1968), this development, induced by disruptive events or not, does not appear to be evident among these stable patterns in the identity status development across early adulthood. However, research suggests that, for people to maintain their identities, there are other developmental processes behind stable identity status patterns (Carlsson et al., 2015; Kroger, 2002). In line with this, the qualitative material from the identity status interviews was used in

Study II to examine how people maintain a sense of identity across early adulthood and what processes may lie behind a stable identity status development across early adulthood.

## Processes of Identity Development across Early Adulthood

In the qualitative part of Study II, three processes were found among individuals with established identity commitments and stable identity status across early adulthood: *approach to change*, *story integration*, and *participation in a broader life context*. Together, these three processes showed how identity development continues from the late 20s to the early 30s, within patterns of identity status stability in identity achievement and foreclosure.

In the first process of identity development found in Study II, *approach to change*, commitment development in one's early 30s did not seem to be driven only by external influences. Instead, it also appeared to be driven by internal motivations to change and evolve previously established commitments. This was surprising, as there has been a great deal of theoretical work and studies suggesting that external causes are often part of development. For example, Bosma and Kunnen (2001) proposed that change that occurs after a conflict that cannot be assimilated into a person's present identity will induce an accommodative change. Anthis (2002) also showed that stressful life events, such as divorce or job loss, are associated with increased levels of identity exploration and decreases in identity commitments. It could be that external events like those mentioned by Anthis (2002) in turn induce internal reflections. For development in one's early 30s, examined in Study II, although external change may have induced internal reflections for some individuals, a change in commitment development was also evident in deliberations, indicating an inner drive to change. Thus, findings in Study II show some similarity to the Kroger and Green study (1996), in which participants talked in retrospect about their identity development. In that study they found that, in many of the identity domains, often around half of the changes related to identity status change were due to "internal changes" such as altered perspective or new awareness through introspection. In a similar vein, research has found that change in work commitment can be motivated by one's own passion in life, indicating a more inner desire to change and evolve in one's commitments (Bauer & McAdams, 2004).

Findings in Study II also showed that individuals coded to stable identity achievement and stable foreclosure exhibited a deepening development in *approach to change*. But for some, mostly individuals in stable identity foreclosure, Study II also showed a weakening development in this process that involved a more rigid and passive approach to change in areas such as work, romantic relationships, parenthood, and work/family priorities. Thus, as previous research has indicated, commitment development can be difficult when commitments relevant to adult roles have been implemented (Robinson, 2015; Robinson & Wright, 2013). Similar to previous research (Kroger & Marcia, 2011), Study II showed that individuals who have not explored their commitments might have more difficulty changing their commitments when they no longer fit. Thus, the process *approach to change* illustrates both the development of commitments that appear to guide the individuals forward in their lives through early adulthood, as well as how commitment development may stagnate when people become more passive or rigid in relation to changing their commitments.

The second process found in Study II, *story integration*, showed that integrating the story through temporal and thematic integration was important for identity development in one's early 30s. Results thus show that individuals continue to integrate their story of how they became who they are, with regard to temporal integration, integration of the past, present and future, and thematic integration, integration accentuating the overall theme in the story, and that this is an important part of the identity development in early adulthood. This second process showed similarities to findings from another dominant perspective within the study of identity development, the narrative approach (Habermaas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1985; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Temporal integration (or chronological coherence) of the narrative and thematic integration are both components of narrative coherence (Adler et al., 2018), and have also been found to develop over time (Reese et al., 2011). Narrative coherence is an important aspect of narrative identity, as it helps individual's integrate their experiences in life and relate them to each other, facilitating a meaningful and coherent narrative identity (Köber et al., 2015). Study II therefore demonstrates that integrating the story is an important developmental mechanism for the identity in early adulthood, and may strengthen the identity. Findings in Study II also show that story stability, with no change in temporal or thematic integration, may lead to identity stagnation and a weakening of the identity. As people continuously encounter new experiences in life, some of these experiences may be meaningful for their identity and therefore become integrated (McAdams, 2013). A stable temporal or thematic story integration between ages 29 and 33, a period of four years, thus indicates little identity development.

A deepening development of story integration was evident in both stable identity achievement and stable foreclosure, as was the weakening process involving stagnation, suggesting that the development of *story integration* was important within both patterns of stability. Interestingly, the development process of *story integration* also involved meta-exploration, whereby people added new reflections on previous exploration concerning how they had arrived at their commitments; that is, previous exploration that was not included at age 29. This suggests that people may revisit their stories and add aspects of previous exploration to strengthen their present commitments and paths in life.

The third process of identity development, *participation in a broader life context*, showed that development in early adulthood involved taking part in aspects beyond oneself and moving more towards “we” in identity development. The weakening part of this process also indicated that some, albeit few, individuals became more limited in terms of their relationships to other people and society at large. The *participation in a broader life context* process is similar to what can be expected in the development later in midlife according to Erikson’s (1968) psychosocial theory of development, in which the central crisis of midlife involves generativity and stagnation. For example, goals characterizing engagement in more generative tasks become more noticeable as people move into midlife (McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1993). However, Study II showed that this process is also evident in the identity development in early adulthood. These findings can be understood through Erikson’s (1968) theory, which also highlights that developmental tasks such as generativity appear in some form throughout one’s development. Thus, findings in Study II regarding *participation in a broader life context* illustrate that identity issues in early adulthood interact with the psychosocial task of generativity. Taken together, the findings in Study II display that moving towards a deepening development of the identity in this process, and increasing connections with others in one’s identity – that is, moving from “I” to “we” (Kroger, 2015) – is a salient identity process for early adults.

It was mainly individuals coded to identity achievement who showed this deepening development of increasing their participation in a broader life context. In contrast, other studies have found that both identity achievement and foreclosure were related to a capacity for generativity among young and mid-life adults (Beaumont & Pratt, 2011). It could be that the deepening process in Study II involving increased participation in a broader life context also becomes more evident within the stable foreclosure pattern when moving into midlife, and would thus become more noticeable within this group. However, as indicated by the many individuals coded to identity achievement who showed deepening development in Study II, in early adulthood this process of increased participation beyond oneself seems to be facilitated by the capacity

to explore commitments. Further, as research has also found relations between identity achievement in areas of parenthood and higher generativity (Pulkkinen, Lyyra, Fadjukoff, & Kokko, 2016), there might be some domains that drive the development of increased participation more. In sum, findings in Study II showed that increased participation in a broader context is a salient identity development process in early adulthood. For future research examining how people might extend their identities beyond themselves, it would be valuable to examine whether there are certain aspects of early adults' lives, such as becoming a parent, that drive this development from "I" to "we" in early adulthood.

Taken together, what the three processes show is that there is more to identity development in early adulthood than what is captured merely by identity status. For the identity to continue developing in early adulthood, individuals need to continue evolving their commitments, develop their story of how they reached their commitments, and begin to extend their identities beyond themselves.

### Identity Development across the Three Identity Processes

Findings in Study II illustrated the complex patterns of individual identity development across the three processes in early adulthood. With regard to identity status, individuals coded to identity achievement were frequently represented at the deepening endpoint of the three processes. This indicates that exploration before establishing commitments (which signifies identity achievement) may serve as a foundation for an open and flexible identity and continued identity development in early adulthood. Among the individuals coded to foreclosure – that is, those who had not explored before establishing their commitments – there were more individual differences in the processes of continued identity development: some were coded more towards the deepening endpoints and others more towards the weakening endpoints of the three processes. Thus, although previous identity exploration can facilitate development, this might not always be crucial for continued identity development. Because identity exploration is a psychologically challenging process, it is unlikely that individuals will explore identity issues if it is not necessary (Kroger, 1996; Waterman, 1999). Kroger (1995) also differentiates between developmental and firm foreclosure, with individuals in the developmental foreclosure group being more open to future changes in their commitments than those in the firm foreclosure group. Thus, in line with findings in Study II, there seem to be individuals coded to foreclosure who are more open to development as well as those whose commitments are firmer and more closed in relation to continued development.



Findings in Study II demonstrate how people develop their identities across early adulthood. As there have been few studies on identity development in adulthood (Fadjukoff & Kroger, 2016), Study II contributes specific knowledge about how people continue to develop their identity in this early part of adulthood. Findings from Study II indicate that people mature in their identity status development across early adulthood, and that individual patterns are commonly represented by high stability. By examining these stable patterns, Study II also showed three important developmental processes in early adulthood, through which individuals continue to maintain their identity in this phase of life.

## Narrating Difficult Experiences in the Swedish Context

Study III examined the cultural framework for telling identity narratives of difficult experiences among early adults in Sweden, by investigating narrative patterns, and relations between these narrative patterns and well-being. This study revealed several findings that shed light on how culture may be important for the narrative identity.

### Emotional Sequencing within Narratives of Difficult Experiences

Findings in Study III showed four equally prevalent emotional sequences within the identity narratives of difficult experiences: *redemptive sequencing*, *neutral/vague sequencing*, *combination of positive and negative sequencing*, and *negative sequencing*. Analyses of these emotional sequences and their associations with well-being showed that only negative sequencing was associated with less well-being. No differences were found between redemptive, neutral/vague, or combination of positive and negative sequencing and well-being. Thus, the results indicate that, among early adults in Sweden, there is not a single dominant emotional sequencing within narratives of difficult experiences but rather several that seem to be similarly associated with well-being.

First, it is notable that *redemption* was found to represent one of the four emotional sequences within the narratives of difficult experiences among early adults in Sweden. This way of structuring a narrative of a difficult experience with a positive framing, or resolution of a negative experience, represents a common way of telling a narrative in the U.S. and is also associated with well-being (Adler & Poulin, 2009; Adler et al., 2015; Dunlop & Tracy, 2013; McAdams et al., 2001; McAdams, 2006; McLean & Lilgendahl, 2008; Pals,

2006a). Indeed, redemption has been found to represent a master narrative in the U.S. (McAdams, 2006; McLean & Syed, 2015); that is, an appropriate way a story should be told, involving some negative scene that moves to a silver lining at the end (McLean & Syed, 2015). It could be that narrating a difficult experience with some kind of positive resolution is a resourceful way of framing these types of experiences, independent of culture. However, as Study III showed, in the Swedish context, this redemptive structure did not stand out with regard to number of narratives, or wellbeing, and other emotional sequences were also used to frame difficult experiences.

Findings in Study III indicated that *combination of positive and negative sequencing* and *neutral/vague sequencing* were also common in the Swedish context. These findings may be discussed in the light of cultural aspects in Sweden. Emotional sequencing involving a combination of positive and negative evaluations of difficult experiences could represent a way to include something positive having been gained from the experience, but with the important aspect of doing so without standing out. That is, when people include both positive and negative expressions about their experiences this almost diminishes, or balances out, the positive with the negative. Indeed, in Sweden there is a social law, “the Law of Jante”, that states that you should not stand out in relation to others. In fact, although individuality is valued within Swedish culture, so is conformity (Daun, 2005; Trost, 2012). Thus, there should be room for expressions of individuality, but as conformity to others is also a valued quality, the narrative identity needs to comply with the Law of Jante. A narrative that does not comply could risk violating social laws, which would be seen as less admirable behavior. Furthermore, in line with the Law of Jante, the neutral/vague sequences found in Study III represent narratives in which the individuals do not evaluate their experiences with any evident emotional evaluations but rather in a more neutral way in line with “it [the experience] has not affected me”. In this way they do not frame their narrative by highlighting any emotions, and thereby they do not stand out. These types of values in Sweden – conforming to others and not standing out – may therefore influence the ways in which expressions of individuality are appropriate for individuals’ narrative identity, using two emotions to equalize each other or simply being more neutral in one’s evaluations of difficult experiences.

If the social Law of Jante is important to the emotional sequences found in Study III, we may also expect to find this influence on narratives in other contexts, such as media (see, e.g., McAdams, 2006). Indeed, discussions of and connections to the Law of Jante can be found in Swedish daily newspapers. In one of the biggest papers, *Dagens nyheter*, a columnist recently discussed a popular radio program called “Sommarpratarna”, in which famous people from Sweden tell stories about their lives. In this column, the author explains that

listening to the people in this program, who do not follow the Law of Jante but instead paint their story of success when talking about their lives, makes him feel a bit uncomfortable as they do not follow the Jante culture (Walden, 2019). Similarly, in another daily newspaper, a columnist discussed the life story of one of the famous people who had appeared on this Swedish radio show, stating, “It’s difficult to feel sorry for someone who has the ability to turn every setback into success” (Andersson, 2019, para. 7). These two articles illustrate how the Law of Jante is evident within Swedish media, which also suggests that it is not appropriate to narrate life stories that do not follow it. Or, put differently, it does not go unnoticed by the public. In sum, the Law of Jante appears to be something that can cause the “audience” in Sweden to react when people do not tell their stories according to this law. Therefore, this social law may also have bearing on how early adults narrate experiences important to their identity, such as framing their experiences by combining positive and negative emotions, or through neutral/vague emotional sequencing. In future research, it could be fruitful to examine how others in Sweden, representing the audience, react to different types of identity narratives. It would also be valuable to examine whether these emotional sequences found in Study III are common in other cultures, such as in other countries in Northern Europe.

### **Difficult Experiences and Impact on the Identity – Associations with Well-being**

Study III examined relations between how people described the impact of their difficult experiences on the identity and well-being. The findings in this study highlighted that both negative and positive impact referring to some change of perception related to an individual’s identity, for instance positive growth, was evident in the narratives of difficult experiences. That is, people expressed that their experiences led to either, or sometimes both, a positive and/or negative impact on their identity. Furthermore, this study showed that a positive impact was associated with satisfaction with life. Thus, similar to previous findings, these results support the findings that positive self-growth from difficult experiences facilitates well-being (see, e.g., Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011; Pals, 2006a). In parallel to previous studies, negative impact – that is, some kind of negative reasoning or negative meaning making – was associated with less well-being (Banks & Salmon, 2013; Cox & McAdams, 2014; Greenhoot, Sun, Bunnell, & Lindboe, 2013; Lilgendahl, McLean, & Mansfield, 2013).

In relation to findings on impact on the identity and associations with well-being, it can also be noted that individuals in the neutral/vague sequencing expressed less positive and negative impact in their narratives compared to the other emotional sequences. Similarly, a study on trauma narratives (similar to

narratives of difficult experiences) found that only 23% of the sample showed personal growth (Lilgendahl, McLean, & Mansfield, 2013). Thus, as these researchers conclude, it may require a great deal of effort from the individual to find growth from negative experiences in the past. It could also be the negative events in themselves that influence individuals' well-being and impact identity. With regard to satisfaction with life, a meta-analytic review showed that changes in life satisfaction depend on what type of major life event is examined (Luhmann, Hofmann, Eid, & Lucas, 2012). It could therefore be that the experienced event had an impact on the participants' life satisfaction and/or influenced how they interpreted the impact of their experiences. Nevertheless, Study III did show that, for individuals who narrate their difficult experiences with some kind of perceived positive impact on identity, such as that found in the redemptive and combination of positive and negative emotional sequences, this seemed to facilitate positive identity development and well-being in early adulthood. These findings may also be important for continued well-being over time, as research suggests that narrative processes can predict outcomes later in life. Research has found that, among women who had experienced divorce, those who were able to narrate their experiences in a more elaborate way increased their ego development over the next two years (King & Raspin, 2004). Longitudinal research on narratives has also found relations between self-change connections in high point stories on romantic relationships and increased life satisfaction over the next years (Lilgendahl & McLean, 2020), associations between meaning making and emotion regulation two years later (Cox & McAdams, 2014), and shown that coherent positive resolution of challenging experiences can lead to more resiliency, resulting in a higher life satisfaction 10 years later (Pals, 2006a). Thus, the ways in which people integrate their experiences into the identity can serve as a positive foundation to build on beyond early adulthood. As Study III showed that both negative and positive impact was evident in the narratives of difficult experiences, it would be valuable to examine longitudinal relations between these types of self-change processes and well-being later in life.

Taken together, the findings in Study III demonstrate how early adults in Sweden narrate their difficult experiences. By employing a cultural framework in doing so, this study adds to the understanding of how culture is important for identity development. The four emotional sequences that were found demonstrate common ways of how difficult experiences were evaluated in the Swedish context and their relation to well-being. These findings are significant, as little research has examined how difficult experiences are narrated, or the role of redemption in narratives of difficult experiences in contexts outside the U.S. (see Blackie et al., 2020). Findings from Study III show that early

adults in Sweden narrate their difficult experiences through four emotional sequences, and that these are equally common. Apart from negative sequencing, these emotional sequences were similarly associated with psychological well-being, suggesting that they represent appropriate ways of narrating difficult experiences in Sweden.

## Developing into Early Adulthood in the Swedish Context

Together, the three studies in this thesis examined how people develop into early adulthood with regard to two aspects of the self, identity and personality. This development could also be influenced by the cultural context (Baltes et al., 1988). Sweden represents an individualistic culture and a context in which identity can be viewed as an important individual project (Wängqvist & Frisé, 2016). In the mainstream Swedish cultural context there are also other aspects that may be especially important for the development into early adulthood, such as equality and conformity (e.g., the Law of Jante). Therefore, how the Swedish context may be connected to people's identity development into early adulthood will be discussed below.

First, the identity process of exploration and commitments examined in Study II may have been influenced by ideological notions of gender equality that are embedded in present-day Swedish cultural identity (Townsend, 2002). Findings in Study II showed that at ages 25 and 29, more men were coded to the diffused status and more women to identity achievement, but no gender differences were found at age 33. This suggests that gender differences are more pronounced in earlier parts of early adulthood, but that the differences in exploration and commitment processes subsequently disappear; in this sample, in the early 30s. In parallel, findings from a longitudinal study conducted in one of the other Nordic countries, Finland, examining identity status development with a sample from an older generation, a 20-year older cohort (started in 1959, compared to the GoLD study, which started in 1982), also showed that gender differences in identity status tend to disappear as individuals get older (Fadjuikoff et al., 2016). However, in this older cohort it was not until age 50 that gender differences in identity status diminished. It could therefore be that findings of gender differences in these two different cohorts shed light on the importance the "gender revolution" might have had for identity development among the younger-generation participants in Study II. Participants in Study II (i.e., the younger cohort) grew up during this gender revolution, which involved political agendas facilitating the aspiration of more equal sharing of

family responsibilities (Haas, 1992; Haas & Hwang, 2013). In this way, there may have been more egalitarian norms prominent in the younger cohort's lives as they grew up, which could have influenced their identity development. Within identity domains such as parenthood and issues of how to prioritize work and family, there might, for example, have been more pressure on men to explore these areas at an earlier age in the younger cohort than for men in the older cohort in Finland. More pronounced norms concerning equality may therefore have bearing on identity development and result in gender differences diminishing between men and women already at age 33 rather than later, as in the older cohort from Finland. However, it should also be noted that, research has shown that issues within the domains of parenthood and work/family priorities are salient for women already in their mid-20s (Frisen et al., 2014), and that in their early 30s more women have made commitments after exploring identity issues within the parenthood domain compared to men of the same age (Gyberg & Frisén, 2017). Nonetheless, the findings in Study II that gender differences diminish over time between women and men, indicating that both women and men have engaged in the process of exploring and making commitments (i.e., identity achievement), are a result that may be expected as people continue to develop their identities across the life span. For example, challenging life events later in midlife, such as divorce, illness, and loss of occupation, may destabilize the identity, pushing the individual to engage in a process of identity revision (Lilgendahl, 2015). As a result of this, the individual may have to go through the process of identity exploration in order to find and establish new commitments. In this way, continued identity development across the whole life span can lead to less pronounced gender differences in the achieved identity status over time.

Furthermore, Study II showed that, for many of the participants, their development in the contexts of love and work involved new transitions from the mid-20s to early 30s into long-term social roles of adulthood. Some transitions were more evident during the period from the mid- to late 20s, such as working after post-secondary education. Other changes were evident from both the mid- to late 20s and the late 20s to early 30s, such as cohabiting with a partner and having or expecting children. Thus, in line with what we would expect in the Swedish context, many of the participants had made transitions into adulthood by the early 30s, involving romantic relationships or starting a family (Statistics Sweden, 2018). Taken together, this would indicate that during early adulthood many individuals in the Swedish context are engaged in establishing themselves in their new adult roles. With regard to what has been suggested regarding this phase of life, this would also suggest that individuals in Sweden may be engaged in the process of evaluating their roles, and may also become more invested in them (Arnett, 2012; Pals, 1999). Indeed, Study II showed

three processes of identity development whereby the first process, approach to change, indicated that people do continue to change and adjust their identity commitments in early adulthood.

In relation to the Swedish cultural context, another interesting finding with regard to becoming more invested in roles is the identity development process in early adulthood involving participation in a broader life context that was found in Study II. It could be, as Arnett (2012) suggests, that becoming immersed in parenthood roles also leads to more community involvement. Taking part in community roles, such as helping out with a child's sports team or engaging in parent groups at school, can thus be a new aspect of early adults' lives. This community involvement could also be a part of what drives this new identity development process in early adulthood, moving beyond oneself and more towards including others in one's identity development. However, there might also be a cultural quality that influences this process, as people in Sweden form their identities within an individualistic culture that simultaneously values conformity in relation to others (Trost, 2012). Research on adult markers (see Arnett, 2001) in Sweden has shown that, to be perceived as an adult, both individualistic criteria (e.g., accepting responsibility and consequences for one's actions) and interdependence with others (i.e., becoming less self-oriented and developing greater consideration for others) are valued (Wängqvist & Frisé, 2016). It may therefore not be surprising that this conformity, or interdependence with others, may also be reflected in the identity development processes in early adulthood, such as participation in a broader life context.

Furthermore, in Study III four emotional sequences were found within Swedish early adults' identity narratives of difficult experiences. As discussed above, two of these emotional sequences, combining positive and negative emotions and neutral/vague sequencing, could have been influenced by conformity to others and what is socially accepted in line with the Law of Jante – not standing out. Thus, similar to how the cultural context may have been important to the identity development processes found in Study II (participation in a broader context), the double nature in the Swedish context, comprised of individualistic values as well as valuing conformity and not standing out in relation to others, may also have bearing on the narrative identity and the common way of framing narratives of difficult experiences in Sweden. Taken together, gender equality norms and individualistic values, as well as conformity to others, can in different ways have influenced the development into early adulthood in the Swedish context.

# Theoretical Discussion

## Personality Development

In Study I, associations were found between ego resiliency and ego control, and the Big Five traits. While one of the assumptions regarding the Big Five traits is that they are orthogonal (i.e., do not correlate with each other), there are connections between them (Block, 1995; Carroll, 2002; Digman, 1997). There are different explanations for why these relations can be found (see, e.g., Ashton, Lee, Goldberg, & de Vries, 2009; Bäckström, 2007; Bäckström, Björklund, & Larsson, 2009; Chuang et al., 2012), but as DeYoung (2006) argued, it is important to examine both unique variance and shared variance as they can provide further understanding about individuals' personalities in terms of their tendencies to feel, think, and behave in certain ways. Therefore, including meta-traits that shed light on some of the shared variance among the Big Five traits may facilitate new frameworks for understanding personality (DeYoung, 2006, 2015). Indeed, as the Big Five model has been criticized for being more descriptive than providing a theory (Block, 1995, 2010; Digman, 1997; McAdams, 1992), it could be valuable to examine the Big Five traits as part of a broader framework situated under higher-order traits (see, e.g., DeYoung, 2015). As findings in Study I indicate that the meta-traits of ego resiliency and ego control, compared to those of plasticity and stability, are differently associated with the Big Five traits, examinations employing ego resiliency and ego control in relation to the Big Five traits might further the knowledge on the role of these meta-traits in a trait hierarchy framework (see also Huey & Weisz, 1997).

From a developmental perspective it is also important to note that researchers have found that interrelations between the Big Five traits are different at younger ages compared to in adulthood (see Soto & Tackett, 2015). As Study I showed that ego resiliency and ego control appear to be relatively enduring parts of the personality from childhood to early adulthood, and are associated with adult adaptation, these meta-traits may therefore be especially valuable to include when examining personality traits in a broader framework at younger ages and across time.

## Identity Development

Study II examines adult identity development, using the identity status perspective with follow-up investigations of individual patterns of stability in the committed statuses across early adulthood. As research on adult identity development is limited, and little is known about which identity processes are



involved in this development, Study II highlights one way to capture development in different parts of adulthood. Through the qualitative examinations, a model of processes of identity development among individuals with established identity commitments and stable identity status across early adulthood was found. The starting point for these examinations came from a previous model (Carlsson et al., 2015). The study from which this model was developed came from the same longitudinal study as that used in Study II (and all the studies in this thesis). However, Carlsson et al. (2015) examined identity development after established commitment in the late 20s, from age 25 to 29. Carlsson and colleagues (2015) showed that, in the late 20s, the developmental processes involved *approach to changing life conditions, meaning making, and development of a personal life direction*. Compared to this previous study, what became evident in Study II when examining identity development in people's early 30s, from age 29 to 33, was that the new approach to change in commitments among the participants appeared to also be driven by internal factors rather than only external ones. This might indicate that, in the early 30s, when many have an established life in terms of work and family, there are not as many contextual changes demanding commitment adjustment as in the late 20s, when people are transitioning into these adult roles (Arnett, 2000). However, in the early 30s the continuous development of commitments seems to be important even when there might not be as much external pressure to change. Moreover, the way the story changed in people's early 30s involved more integration in terms of temporal and thematic integration, rather than simply making more meaning of specific experiences as in the late 20s. This could indicate that in their early 30s individuals were engaged in narrative processes that involved bringing together a more coherent story of their identity. The third process found in Study II, *participation in a broader life context*, involved an integration of the identity in relation to others compared to the third process in the late 20s, *development of a personal life direction*, which involved a development of agency in relation to societal norms. This suggests that, in their 30s, individuals start to engage in new ways of including others in their identity development. Taken together, the findings in Study II demonstrate that there are new, important processes that are part of the identity development in early adulthood. As this is a time when many are engaged in establishing themselves in several life areas, Study II sheds light on how people maintain a sense of identity in this particular phase of life.

Study III, which employed a narrative perspective on identity, examined how early adults narrate their difficult experiences in life and the relation of this to their well-being. There has been little research on how people in other cultural contexts narrate this type of negative experience, and this study contributes an understanding of how culture may be important to the narrative

identity. Study III examined the emotional sequences in narratives of difficult experiences among early adults in Sweden using an inductive, qualitative analysis, also examining the frequencies of emotional sequencing. In addition, we investigated how these structures relate to psychological functioning. This is one approach to investigating master narratives; that is, the dominant, or common, stories told within cultures (see, e.g., McLean & Syed, 2015). Undeniably, McAdams' extensive work, which places the redemptive story as a master narrative of how stories should be told in the U.S., includes many more ways to highlight this master narrative (e.g., through history, books, magazines, and more full life stories; McAdams, 2006). However, as there has been very little research on how difficult experiences are told in cultures outside the U.S., Study III illustrates one way to examine culturally common ways to narrate stories of challenges. In this approach, we were open to the new emotional sequences within the Swedish narratives. Thus, Study III provides one piece of the puzzle towards finding dominant ways of narrating experiences in the Swedish cultural context. To understand more about the master narratives in Sweden, it would be valuable to examine emotional sequencing within other types of narratives such as turning points and narratives in which people feel they have deviated from the norm, as well as more in-depth analyses in relation to Swedish history. Qualitative work, combined with more quantitative analyses examining frequencies of emotional structures and associations with well-being such as those performed in Study III, is one way to bring the field forward.

This thesis used two perspectives on identity: the identity status model (Studies I and II) and the narrative identity approach (Study III). The identity status model and the narrative approach are two different perspectives that both examine identity development but emphasize different processes in this development. The identity status model examines processes of identity commitment and exploration (Marcia, 1966), while the narrative identity perspective investigates people's narratives and how subjective stories about experiences in life are integrated into the individual's identity (McAdams, 1985). As they shed light on different aspects of the identity, researchers have suggested that these two approaches to identity development can contribute to each other (Carlsson et al., 2015; McLean & Pasupathi, 2012; Syed, 2012). For example, in their theoretical paper, McLean and Pasupathi (2012) highlighted that in narrative identity research there has been a lack of attention to how life story development interplays with people's engagement in other central identity-defining processes, such as identity exploration and commitment processes (defined in the identity status model). Thus, it can be meaningful to address both identity perspectives to obtain a fuller understanding of identity development. For ex-

ample, research employing an integrated approach, using both the identity status model and the narrative approach, has found relations between increase in identity exploration and change of narrative theme in emerging adults' narratives of ethnicity-related experiences (Syed & Azmitia, 2010). Researchers have also found certain narrative patterns among individuals within the identity statuses (Josselson, 1996), and shown that individuals with more complex and sophisticated meaning making of past events scored higher on indicators of identity achievement (McLean & Pratt, 2006). However, findings in some of this research and in other studies suggest that the degree to which these two approaches converged was relatively small, suggesting that they are in many ways distinctly different approaches to identity (Alisat, & Pratt, 2012; McLean & Pratt, 2006; McLean, Syed, Yoder, & Greenhoot, 2016; van Doelselaar, McLean, Meeus, Denissen, & Klimstra, 2019). As identity is a broad and complex concept, different approaches to identity can contribute in different ways to the understanding of identity development. Thus, the two perspectives on identity used in Studies I, II, and III together shed light on important aspects part of identity development in early adulthood.

## Personality and Identity Development

Taken together, the three studies in this thesis shed light on different aspects of the self, sometimes also referred to broadly as personality (see, e.g., McAdams, 2015; McAdams, 2019), concerning who people are as well as how people become who they are. As part of the self, personality traits and identity are also connected to each other (see, e.g., McAdams, 2013; McAdams & Pals, 2006; Roberts & Caspi, 2003), but research examining how different levels of the personality are intertwined is scarce (McLean, 2017). Study I examined associations between the meta personality traits of ego resiliency and ego control, and identity development involving exploration and commitment processes. As one of the few studies to examine these relations in early adulthood (see also Fadjukoff et al., 2019; Helson & Srivastava, 2001), Study I contributes to the field. It adds to the understanding of how meta-traits are associated with identity development and processes of exploration and commitment in early adulthood.

Theoretically, there are other approaches to identity that could also have been meaningful to examine in relation to the meta-traits of ego resiliency and ego control (Study I). One approach that would be valuable to examine is narrative identity, perhaps particularly narrative identity and experiences such as the difficult and challenging ones examined in Study III. At its foundation, the meta-trait of ego resiliency is related to how people handle new, difficult situ-

ations in life, and would therefore be expected to be related to identity narratives involving difficult experiences. One previous study exploring the meta-traits of stability and plasticity and narrative identity found relations between personality and identity (Wilt, Olson, & McAdams, 2011). This study examined narratives of how individuals perceived novel opportunities in life in terms of threat and exploration. Indeed, as they predicted, Wilt and colleagues (2011) found that there were unique negative associations between stability and threat, and unique positive associations between plasticity and exploration. Future examinations of how the meta-traits of ego resiliency and ego control and identity fit together in frameworks, such as the three-layer model of personality (McAdams & Pals, 2006; McAdams, 2013), could provide a greater understanding of how different levels of the personality are connected and the ways in which development in one layer influences other parts of this three-layer model.

## Methodological Discussion

The studies in this thesis are part of the longitudinal project GoLD. One of the limitations in the studies is their small sample size, which restricts the degree to which generalizations can be made. However, although the sample size was not optimal, it must also be considered that this is a longitudinal study spanning many years, with several measurement points and a high retention rate across the years (between 82 and 95%). The three studies in this thesis thus provide important information on the development into early adulthood and the roles of identity and personality.

GoLD started in 1982 (Lamb et al., 1988) with a representative sample from Gothenburg (Broberg, 1989), the second largest city in Sweden. However, with regard to generalizability, how representative the sample is may have changed over the three decades that have passed since participants were recruited. Previous theses within the GoLD project have drawn comparisons to national samples in order to examine how representative the sample was at ages 25 and 29 (Carlson 2015; Wängqvist, 2013). At age 25, compared to national samples, in the GoLD sample a larger proportion of the participants had a university degree (Wängqvist, 2013), which findings at age 33 also confirmed (Statistics Sweden, 2020a). Moreover, at age 29 participants in the GoLD study were less likely to have children compared to the national sample (Carlsson, 2015). However, at age 33, 67% of the participants had or were expecting children, which is comparable to national statistics on parents' age at the birth of their first child in this cohort (women age 29, men age 32; Statistics Sweden,

2020b). Nonetheless, one of the significant strengths of this longitudinal study is that it consists of a community sample with participants from different socioeconomic backgrounds and occupational contexts, and there has been a low study attrition rate over the 30 years it has been running.

## Personality Development

Study I examined personality development across the first three decades of life, which is a long time span. We therefore employed previous validated scales in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, drawing on items from the q-sort to construct different scales for ego resiliency and ego control. Measuring personality from childhood to early adulthood can be difficult, because what are considered to be markers for personality in childhood may not be the same as those in adolescence or adulthood. In an attempt to overcome this in Study I, scales for ego resiliency and ego control were constructed through three different approaches, with the measure used through all waves of this longitudinal project (the CCQ set): one representing Block's prototype items (2008) for ego resiliency and ego control; one drawing on scale items used in research conducted with children and adolescents (Eisenberg et al., 1996); and one comparing these items' scales involving the age appropriation q-sort items in adulthood (CAQ; Letzring et al., 2005). These scales (six in total: three for ego resiliency and three for ego control) were subsequently used in the study to test the robustness of the findings. In this way the q-sort instrument, and previously validated scales from different phases in life, provided opportunities in Study I to explore personality from a very early age in childhood and across three decades of life. For ego control, it should be noted that analyses of congruence coefficients in Study I between the factor loadings indicated that the similarity of this construct over time varied, but overall there was moderate congruence, which can be expected as this longitudinal study covered a large time span. Furthermore, the q-sort CCQ used in Study I to create scales of ego resiliency and ego control is a q-sort instrument, in which all 100 cards are placed in a certain order depending on how well they describe a person's characteristics (Block, 1961). Then, with several experts' ratings of how a resilient and over-/under-controlled person should be and act (sorted with all 100 cards), these ratings are considered composites of a resilient prototype, to which all participants are compared. Thus, one limitation is that CCQ as a measure (Block & Block, 1980b) was not initially intended to be used to create scales. However, as many other researchers have employed the same approach to creating scales as was done in Study I, this way of creating scales from the q-sort has been validated in several ways (Eisenberg et al., 1996; Eisenberg et al., 2003, 2004; Letzring et al., 2005; Martel et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2013).

There are other issues to consider when personality is measured from early ages, such as the fact that different raters are often used. In Study I, the participants' mothers rated the participants' development up to age 15, and then from age 21 the participants rated themselves. However, when assessing small children (this study started when the participants were two years old), other people's ratings such as parents' or teachers' ratings of the children must be used (Soto & Tackett, 2015). Having the participants' ratings of their personality along with their rating at age 15, before the rater changed at age 21, could then be valuable for comparison across raters. But as this information was not available in Study I, when the findings are discussed the influence of different raters and what the results actually reflect are taken into consideration.

In addition to measuring personality across the long age span in Study I and with different raters, there are other issues concerning how to examine change over time (McArdle, 2009). For example, a piecewise model could have been employed in the statistical analyses of the growth curves (Flora, 2008; Singer & Willet, 2003). This approach may have enabled us to explore change within a particular time span, such as examining the development from age 21 to 33 when participants rated themselves, or from age two to 15, that is, only child and adolescent development, rated by the mothers. Smaller windows of time could also have been examined, as well as whether change within a particular time span was associated with outcomes in adulthood (Flora, 2008); for example, ego control that showed a quadratic growth curve, with more rapid changes in childhood. However, in Study I the aim was to examine the development from age two to 33, with a focus on how the development within this age span was associated with adult development.

Another limitation of Study I was that the interaction between ego resilience and ego control was not analyzed in relation to outcomes in adulthood. In theory, the levels of these two personality constructs should interact, whereby high ego resiliency and an intermediate level of ego control are assumed to be optimal. Previous studies using personality types to study ego resiliency and ego control consider different types based on the combination of ego resiliency and ego control and their relations to outcomes in adulthood (see, e.g., Denissen et al., 2008). However, the restriction of the sample size in this longitudinal study made it problematic to investigate interactions between ego resiliency and ego control and their relation to adult adaptation. Avenues for future research include investigating ego resiliency and ego control using the continuous scales, examining the interaction between these two constructs; it would be interesting to examine how this is associated with adaptation in early adulthood.

## Identity Development

There are many different ways to measure identity development (see Schwartz, Luyckx, & Crocetti, 2015), even within the different approaches to identity such as the identity status approach used in Studies I and II, or the narrative approach used in Study III.

In Studies I and II, identity status was assessed using the identity status interview (Marcia et al., 1993). This interview is designed to capture individuals' identity formation in terms of how, when, and why a person's identity came to be (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Assessing status in this way, instead of using questionnaires, can be influenced by the participants' ability to verbally express themselves (van Hoof, 1999). To avoid such limitations and ensure that this method of capturing exploration and commitment processes is not dependent on the participant's verbal ability, trained interviewers performed the interviews; the identity status interview is also designed to limit the assessment of verbal ability rather than the actual identity status (Marcia et al., 1993). For example, the semi-structured interview guides the interviewer to probe enough that the interviewee is able to recall relevant identity explorations that occurred in the past (Marcia, 2007). However, this procedure, involving extensive interviewing, is rather lengthy and may limit the number of participants.

Another way to measure identity is through the use of questionnaires, as employed within the dual-cycle perspective of the identity status, that are based on Marcia's work and derive different types of exploration and commitment development that are part of forming and reforming the identity (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006). With the use of these types of approaches to measuring and examining identity status, information from more participants can be collected and the coding procedure is more straightforward as it does not require trained interviewers. However, there has been little research using the dual-cycle perspective in adulthood. Interestingly though, and surprisingly, one study that has measured identity development in adulthood with dual-cycle constructs found no evidence of foreclosure (Arneaud, Alea, & Espinet, 2016). Given that both committed statuses (foreclosure and achievement) have been found in other studies among adults (Cramer, 2004; Fadjukoff et al., 2005, 2016), this would suggest that there are differences in how questionnaires capture foreclosure in adulthood (Carlsson, 2015). Although there are advantages to using questionnaires for assessing identity status, the identity status interviews enable qualitative investigations beyond what questionnaires can capture and they allow for a more in-depth assessment of aspects that provide information about the identity. Additionally, we know very little about adults' identity development (Fadjukoff &

Kroger, 2016); and in a field where little research has been conducted, interviews also provide data for more in-depth qualitative investigations. Qualitative data can capture individual experiences while recognizing general patterns, and can thus provide possibilities to generate new knowledge on identity development in adulthood.

There are also methodological issues to be addressed within the narrative identity perspective employed in Study III. First, as this study only involved one type of story, it is important to consider whether the way an individual narrates their challenges can tell us something about their overall narrative identity, their life story. That is, is there a certain way in which the narrative is told, independent of which type of event it involves? Research suggest that there is a variability in narrative features, such as meaning making and positive and negative impact, depending on which type of experience people are narrating (McLean, Pasupathi, Greenhoot, & Fivush, 2017). This means that people are not consistent in how they narrate experiences that are meaningful for their identity, but that this varies depending on what experience they are narrating. In this way, only one type of story may not be a good measure of the overall narrative identity. However, as the aim of Study III was to examine specifically how difficult experiences are narrated, other types of narratives were not included.

In relation to this, another issue that might be important is what types of experiences the narratives are about and which are more important in different phases in life. Research suggests that positive experiences are particularly important to younger people (Lilgendahl, 2015). Studies have shown that when narratives about positive experiences are used to understand one's identity better, they are in turn related to positive growth and purpose in life (McLean & Lilgendahl, 2008); and for experiences such as romantic high point narrative, positive change connections are related to increased life satisfaction over time (Lilgendahl & McLean, 2020). However, redemptive sequencing in narratives of low points has also been found to be related to higher well-being for younger people but not older people (McLean & Lilgendahl, 2008). Thus, the types of experiences and the narrative patterns of these experiences may yield different knowledge on psychological outcomes in early adulthood.

## Mixed-Methods Research

Studies II and III in this thesis employed a mixed-methods approach. Some of the core characteristics for mixed-methods research are that the data should be collected and analyzed through both quantitative and qualitative methods, and that these different forms of data should be combined or integrated (Creswell & Clark, 2017).



In Study II, the particular mixed-methods design was an explanatory one (Nastasi, Hitchcock, & Brown, 2010). In this type of design a second, qualitative, step is taken to help explain the results in the first, quantitative, step of the study. Thus, the research question addressed in the second step of analysis is guided by the quantitative findings in the first step. One of the challenges of this study design is that the researchers need to determine which of the findings are important to explain (Creswell & Clark, 2017). In Study II, after interpreting the analyses in the first part, the decision was made that the most common pattern of identity status development across early adulthood was the most valuable to investigate. This decision was made after also conferring with the literature in the field, which has shown that identity stability is more common after late adolescence (Carlsson et al., 2015; Kroger et al., 2010; Meeus, 2011). As many people have made further transitions into adulthood by their early 30s, and many might have started establishing themselves more in their adult roles, we also found it important to examine what processes were part of maintaining a sense of identity in the early 30s. However, there were other patterns that could have been equally important to shed light on to further the understanding of the identity development in early adulthood; for example, patterns involving individuals who regressed from identity achievement at age 25 to foreclosure at age 29, and were regarded as identity achieved at age 33 (AFA patterns, nine participants). As it has been suggested that cycle movements are part of adult development (Marcia, 2002), qualitative investigations of this pattern may also have yielded valuable results regarding what is involved in these movements. Nevertheless, we determined that investigating the “superstable” patterns (AAA and FFF) of identity status development in Study II could contribute to new knowledge concerning identity development in early adulthood among the large group of individuals who maintain their commitments over time.

In Study III, qualitative and quantitative approaches were also integrated. First, qualitative analyses were used to capture emotional sequences, followed by quantitative analyses of these sequences and their relation to well-being measures. This mixed-methods approach thus follows the principles of an exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Clark, 2017). In narrative research, qualitative data is first collected through either oral or written formats, and then coding systems can be applied involving the specific narrative variables the researchers want to examine (Adler et al., 2017). However, for new constructs it may sometimes be necessary to develop new coding systems (see Syed & Nelson, 2015). In order to explore difficult experiences using a cultural framework, we therefore found it important in Study III to be open to the qualitative material in order to explore the ways in which difficult experiences were framed among early adults in Sweden. Therefore, integrating the qualitative

results, we developed a new codebook that was grounded in the culture. In this way, and in line with the exploratory sequential design, the qualitative results were translated into coded data that we then used for quantitative testing (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Then, we coded all participants' emotional sequencing into the four categories we found (redemptive sequencing, neutral/vague sequencing, combination of positive and negative sequencing, and negative sequencing), which enabled us to statistically test whether there were any differences between the emotional sequences found. We first explored the frequencies of, and then the relations between, the four emotional sequences and well-being, as well as the impact of the narrated event on the identity using quantitative analyses. Examining narrative variables and relations to well-being is a well-established approach within narrative research (see, e.g., Adler et al., 2016). However, the way we coded the data, using different categories, influenced which statistical analyses could be performed. As this can be seen as a limitation in Study III, it should also be noted that this was a first step in exploring how culture has bearing on narratives of difficult experiences in Sweden. Thus, using a mixed-methods approach in Study III, starting with a qualitative analysis, provided new culturally specific knowledge (Power, Velez, Qadafi, & Tennant, 2018) and information about patterns that we might not have found using only quantitative measures (Syed, 2015). The findings from Study III therefore shed light on emotional sequences that are important to include in further examinations of how culture informs narrative identity in a Swedish context.

## Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the Swedish Ethical Review Act (SFS 2003:460), the ethical review committee in Gothenburg has reviewed and approved this study (Wave 8, dnr: 311-06; Wave 9, dnr: 206-11; Wave 10, dnr: 263-15). Overall, the risks for discomfort and integrity intrusion are considered to be low. In the studies, the information the participants chose to share (and have chosen to share in previous waves of the project) is used with their consent (Swedish Research Council, 2017). Therefore, the risk to the participants is considered to be very low.

One ethical concern regarding this type of longitudinal study is that some participants may feel obligated to continue their participation since they participated in it before. Therefore, during data collection it was stressed that the participants could terminate their participation in the study at any time, without having to give any reason for this. Also, some of the questions in both the

interviews and the questionnaires have a personal quality, such as questions about the participant's most difficult experience (Study III). Here, too, participants were informed that they could always, without having to give a reason, choose not to answer a question. In the interviews used for assessing identity status and the background interview, it was acknowledged that participants who for whatever reason do not wish to become parents, now or ever, might be uncomfortable with questions concerning future parenthood. Therefore, in the interview situation it was emphasized that these questions concerned feelings and thoughts about not wanting to become a parent as well as about wanting to become one. The interviews were semi-structured and were therefore adjusted to each participant's personal situation. Furthermore, all interviewers who performed the interviews were well trained in psychological interviewing and prepared to handle any discomfort caused by the questions. Taken together, ethical considerations have guided the data collection and handling of the material in the studies of this thesis.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the three studies of this thesis demonstrate how people develop into early adulthood in terms of personality and identity, and in relation to culture. Study I examined personality development of the meta-traits of ego resiliency and ego control from childhood to early adulthood. The findings indicated strong stability of ego resiliency. Ego control also demonstrated stability over the full time span, but there was greater change in childhood. Ego resiliency and ego control were both associated with adult well-being, but these associations were generally accounted for by the Big Five traits. Finally, ego resiliency and ego control in childhood and adolescence were associated with adult identity development, suggesting that personality traits could give an early indication of identity processes. Thus, Study I shows how personality develops across the three first decades of life, and how ego resiliency and ego control are important for positive functioning in early adulthood.

In Study II, findings showed that across early adulthood more individuals are characterized by processes representing more mature identity status development (i.e., identity achievement with previous exploration and commitment). Findings also showed that stability in committed statuses was by far the most common pattern across early adulthood. Analyses of identity development among people with these stable patterns of achievement-achievement-achievement (AAA) and foreclosure-foreclosure-foreclosure (FFF) showed that there are important processes that play a part in maintaining a sense of

identity in early adulthood: an inner drive to change; a development of the overall structure of one's story; and a development towards participation beyond personal aspirations.

Study III examined the cultural framework for telling identity narratives of difficult experiences among Swedish early adults. Findings in the study indicate that there seem to be several ways of narrating challenges among early adults in Sweden, with redemptive, combination of positive and negative emotions, neutral/vague, and negative emotional sequencing. In relation to well-being, all emotional sequences were similarly associated with psychological well-being, with the exception of the negative sequencing, which was generally associated with poorer well-being. Overall, these results indicate that, in the Swedish context, narratives of life challenges can be told in several ways, many of which serve a positive function for well-being and identity. This study also shows that an inductive approach can open up new ways of understanding relations between narrative identity and culture.

Taken together, this thesis illuminates the important role of personality and identity – two central aspects of the understanding of the self – in people's psychological development and well-being.

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## APPENDIX

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- I. Syed, M., Eriksson, P. L., Friséén, A., Hwang, C. P., & Lamb, M. E. (2020). Personality development from age 2 to 33: Stability and change in ego resiliency and ego control and associations with adult adaptation. *Developmental Psychology*, *56*, 815-832. doi: 10.1037/dev0000895
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