

A Duck That Flew With Some Theorists

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INTRODUCTION

There are key memories I recalled throughout my journey to college that has played a significant role in my identity development. Although there is not a light that blinks when you entered a new vector from Chickering's seven vectors, or a sound of music right before you enter a new stage of Erickson's eight stages of development – there were many ah-ha moments I can reflect back on that has played a role in my identity today. Through the lens of the theorists, there were a few I resonated with. Ruthellen Josselson's Psychosocial Identity Development, the theory behind environment factors, Vasti Torre's Model of Hispanic Identity Development, Jean Phinney's Model of Ethnic Identity Development, and Berry's model of acculturation all explained how the journey I endured impacted my identity development today.

JOSSELSON'S IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Where I am from has greatly impacted my four years as an undergraduate. I remember the first moments of my 'new' journey so perfectly. My mom and brother had dropped me off in the residence halls at the University of Oregon. I stood there hopelessly as I watched them drive away. I felt so vulnerable. I drove to campus with the hope of connecting with my childhood friend who was also attending the university. However, not knowing how to get to campus, I eventually pulled over and cried (This was not a single tear cry; this was an "I can't do this" type of ugly cry). Reflecting back on that day and the next four years that followed, I can confidently say, where I am from, explained who I was during my undergraduate experience.

Prior to college, I was in the Josselson's guardian/foreclosure pathway. This pathway explained the reaction I had on my new environment because of where I am from. Within the four pathways, foreclosure, achieved, moratoriums, and diffused; the impact of crises and

commitment will influence the most “centrally important dimensions of their identity,” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p.57). Those who fell under the foreclosure (or guardian) stage went through life without having many thoughts to other alternatives outside of what they knew. As a child, those who identified within the foreclosure pathway had absorbed the values and attitudes of their family members, or as an adolescent, have clung onto peers who would help define what was right for them. “These women leapfrogged over the challenges of adolescence, clutching what were safe and familiar,” (Josselson, 1996, p. 37). Growing up, my family values were always important to me; this was due to my fear of disappointing them. My family always made my decisions or I would base my decisions off my family’s values. I stayed in the guardian/foreclosure pathway until high school.

I encountered my fear of disappointing my family briefly during high school which I can now see was me inching towards the searchers/moratorium pathway. This shift occurred during my exploration and rebelling phase of high school. Though despite the moments of rebellion, I consciously knew my parents would not be a fan of this. As the result to my exploration and fear, I ended up where I started, back in the guardian/foreclosure pathway. But this time, I related to this pathway by choice and not by the inability to seek out alternatives. Though I share similar values as those in the guardian/foreclosure pathway, I believe I have reached the pathmakers/identity achievement stage because I am choosing to share the values of my parents and family. My family’s values played a significant role and influenced my behavior throughout my undergraduate education. This idea of the guardian/foreclosure pathway of needing to cling onto someone that provides a sense of safeness and stability brings me back to the first year of my undergraduate journey as I struggled to separate from my family. Being extremely close to my family, I experienced separation anxiety during the first year of my undergraduate education.

“Joesselson uses the term anchoring as a metaphor for the connecting processes that counterbalance separation,” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p 177). Being that my family resembled comfort and stability, they were my anchor. In order to overcome this separation crisis, I managed to seek stability in my childhood friend while in school. That first year was a clear example of the baby steps I took towards letting go my comfort and stability and into my own identity. Prior to college, I had not experienced any form of life changing identity crisis and had made a commitment to my parent’s values. In high school, I transitioned briefly into the moratoriums/searchers pathway where I concluded with much of the same values as I had in the guardian/foreclosure pathway- thus, through Josselson’s identity achievement theory; I had reached the pathmakers/identity achievement stage.

TORRES’S MODEL OF HISPANIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The importance of my childhood environment played a critical role in my life and the lenses that I see through today. I was comfortable with my life prior to college, I knew I was accepted by my peers at school and my family supported me no matter what. It was difficult for me to transition to college due to the fact of where I was from. An eye-opening realization occurred to me briefly before I entered college, and interestingly enough, played a role over the next four years. I remember driving home with my brother after the new student orientation. I shared with him my frustration and my feeling of hopelessness. Being that I experienced my entire K-12 education with the same class of students, I felt accepted by that community. I knew they viewed me for me and my ethnic appearance did not alienate me from them. Majority of my peers identified as Caucasian, resulting in me having only friends who identified as Caucasian. Fast forwarding this to my car ride home with my brother, I was reflecting on the orientation and

was frustrated with thinking my new classmates and community will not know me for me and would prejudice me based off my physical appearance. I was afraid that the Caucasian community at the university would not accept me for me. Prior to college, my friends were mainly Caucasian, as a result, this was something I was comfortable and familiar with. I depended on the same group of people for guidance and clarity: my family and friends. I think growing up and graduating with the same class of students since Kindergarten had a significant impact on my college experience because I stuck to what I was comfortable with and never felt the need to challenge myself in my environment.

My fear of not being accepted by my new community is an example of how environment can impact one's ethnic identity development. I resonated with Vasti Torres's Model of Hispanic Identity Development where he introduced a conceptual model that captured influences of ethnic identity through the sophomore year of college (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Although Torres's targeted audience was Latino students, I saw myself in his theory of how one's environment growing up can impact the first two years of one's college experience. He indicates the range between someone growing up in a diverse community to someone who grew up in a predominately white environment. Students who come from a diverse community are opened to those from other cultures, and those who come from the predominately white environment, "prefer the company of those from the dominate culture, though they are not likely to discard the culture of their ancestor," (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p.280). I relate this back to my experience not because I preferred the company of the predominately white environment, but because that environment was only environment I have ever experienced and have come to known. To relate this theory back to my car ride with my brother and my new community, if I had been rejected from the pre-dominantly white community at the University of

Oregon, my pathway could have shifted to identity diffusion. Even though Torres's theory was based off the Hispanic culture, I think it is important to realize that yes, all cultures are different and individuals experience different journeys however, I believe many students of color can share similar stories given that they are the oppressed group within the American context.

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

I gradually became less dependent on the security I received from home as the baby steps I took towards letting go of my past became larger steps. Being extremely close with my family, I frequently traveled home on the weekends. However, my need for wanting to go home on the weekends gradually went away over the next year as I made new friends and adapted to my new environment. I moved from seeking comfort from home to seeking comfort from my new environment. This was a result of my external environment impacting my experience and identity development. The new city I've grown acquainted to became my new home and my friends became a part of my family. I was enjoying my time and school and my down time with my friends, this became my new home.

According to Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton and Renn, (2010) ethnic identity can be classified into external and internal components. In this context, external means the social and cultural behaviors and influences while internal means the morals and cognitive dimensions of identity. My external ethnic identity changed while in college because my environment had changed. Prior to college, my external ethnic identity at home was mainly Chinese because my home environment was of a Chinese culture. This of course changed when I was in school as my social influences changed. However, because I had my Chinese culture to retreat to at the end of the day, I still felt a strong connection to my Chinese culture. Since moving away for college, it

was the first time in my life where I was physically removed from my external Chinese culture and I moved toward more external American influences both in school and outside of school. According to Josselson, within the identity achievement pathway: “women break the psychological ties to their childhood and form separate, distinct identities,” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 56). Being a bicultural woman, in college, I felt like I was breaking the ties to my Chinese culture because I was not around that culture as much as the American culture. During this time where I felt separated from my Chinese identity, I achieved a deeper understanding of my bicultural identity as I was able to appreciate my Chinese culture more. Through Berry’s acculturative model, I had exploration moments within both cultures but do not believe I fully-ever dismissed my Asian identity or American identity entirely, whether it was external or internal. Of the four outlined distinct acculturative strategies, I identified more with the integrate strategy when in relations to the dominate culture. In other words, I became bicultural and maintained aspects of own group and selectively acquired some aspects of the host culture.

PHINNEY’S MODEL OF ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Prior to high school, I encountered stage one and two of Phinney’s Model of Ethnic Identity Development. Stage one indicates: unexamined ethnic identity (in relations to James Marcia’s Ego Identity Statuses of diffusion-foreclosure). Within this stage, Phinney describes individuals of having not explored feelings or attitudes about their own ethnicity. During my childhood, it was not that I did not had feelings towards my Chinese decent, it was simply my lack of awareness. I simply did not know I was ethnically different than my peers. There was one incident I remembered in elementary school where someone teased me about my eyes, and I

truly had no idea what they were implying (as I mentioned in my “Where I am from” narrative, my lack of awareness could be a good thing or a bad thing). Thus, I did not have a negative outlook on my Chinese identity nor did I have a positive outlook because I thought ethnically, I was the same as everyone else despite growing up in a very different culture. Stage one of this Phinney’s model also relates to the Diversity Development model developed by Chacez, Guido-DiBrito and Mallory. In their framework of Individual Diversity Development, I would put my early childhood in the “unawareness or lack of exposure to others” stage. I was simply unaware that people were different (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

By the time I was in middle school, I entered stage two: Ethnic Identity Search/Moratorium of Phinney’s model. During this stage, students become more aware of issues around ethnic identity such as racism and/or stereotypes resulting in student exploration. Students may also become feel inferior to the dominate culture and thus develop a ‘less than’ feeling perspective. Phinney indicates during this stage, individuals become angry towards the dominate culture (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Reflecting on my pre-teen identity development years, I do not recall ever feeling anger or resentment towards the dominate culture. However, I did feel embarrassed about my own culture and questioning why I couldn’t I be like everyone else. During this phase in my life, I wanted to assimilate to the dominate culture, I was not angry but was just envious. Due to the closeness of my family, I was unable to fully reject my Chinese culture and thus developed and integrated both cultures into my life. This leads me to the final stage of Phinney’s model.

Stage three of Phinney’s model: Ethnic Identity Achievement. By stage three students achieve a healthy bicultural identity and are opened to other cultures. Individuals in this stage have resolved their identity conflicts and are able to appreciate differences. This connects back to

the Diversity Development model as the outermost layer of “Integrating/Validating Others.” By being able to make a commitment to self -identity and able to interact outside of one’s comfort zone, individuals have recognized differences and similarities. “these individuals make reflective choices about individual and group validation of the other,” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 250). By the time I entered the Identity Achievement stage, I believe I was in between my third and fourth year of undergraduate school. It was during this time where I became a student leader of a multicultural program where I was given the privilege and opportunity to hear different stories from students of colors which made me aware of my similarities and differences and made me appreciate that being different is a good thing. Learning from their stories, I became aware of other’s stories which made me become more aware of myself and how I relate to them. I became proud of Chinese heritage and the journey I endured to get to college. I was no longer embarrassed about sharing my childhood experiences as I have reached Ethnic Identity Achievement. I am able to see how things relate to me as an American and as a Chinese individual based off my values. For an example: I identify as a collectivist identity, something that is more valued in the Asian culture. I am so defining my own career path as oppose to listening to what my parents think I should do, this is something that is more valued in the American culture. I share values from both cultures and would not be able to assimilate or separate from one identity even if I wanted to.

ENVIRONMENT

Outside of my ethnic identity development, other parts of my identity developed during my four years of undergraduate school. My involvement through the Service Learning Department and Alternative Break sparked my interests in getting involved which were examples

of Alexander Astin's theory of how student development can be impacted through involvement. "For student learning and growth to occur, students need to actively engage in their environment, and educators need to create opportunities in-and out-of-classroom involvement," (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 31). I feel like I was able to develop and find purpose through my involvement on campus. The value I have for student involvement has impacted me in a significant way where I would like to help other students find their purpose whether if that is through service learning, or in leadership roles.

The importance of purpose correlates with Nancy Schlossberg's Marginality and Mattering theory. Schlossberg indicates for members of the non-dominate groups, marginality is often a permanent condition. Though I don't believe marginality is often a permanent condition, I do believe students of color tend to have a larger obstacle to overcome in order to not feel marginalized. I would hope the more students of color become involved on campus, the less they feel marginalized and the more they feel they matter. Drawing this theory back to my own experience, I first felt marginalized but developed a sense of mattering upon getting more involved on campus. Through being involved on campus, I was able to explore my options and further develop my identity. An example of this includes being involved with the multicultural retreat. The retreat was the first time in my life where I was not the minority of the group; and was given the opportunity to interact with students that shared a similar upbringing as I did. Though we all identified as students of color, I learned about my own privileges as I was listening to the stories from students of color. By listening to their story, I expanded my awareness, knowledge and acceptance of other cultures. I learned that there are other students like me who did not grow up with the dominate culture and that I had similarities with students that grew up completely different than myself.

CONCLUSION

Where I am from influenced my undergraduate experience. Being extremely dependent on my family and my childhood friend, I was very comfortable with being comfortable and following the path my parents had set for me. In terms of theories, I was in the foreclosure/guardian pathway of Josselson's Identity Development theory. By stepping out of my comfort zone, and exploring what college had to offer, I entered the moratorium/searchers pathway. By allowing myself to explore and draw my own conclusions of who I wanted to interact with, how I became involved on campus, and how I spent my time, I allowed myself to grow and develop into identity achievement/ pathmakers. Through Torre's Model of Hispanic Identity Development, I became more aware of how my childhood environment has impacted my lens going into my undergraduate education. I believe I reached Phinney's Ethnic Identity Achievement after being exposed to different cultures and opportunities to get involved on campus. Through the Service Learning Program and the multicultural club, I developed more confidence, a sense of self and my role in society. Where I am from and the experiences I've lived through has impacted my identity development. Looking back on my first day when my family drove away to my last day in class to my last day with my roommates, I feel as though I could not be more different. Because of where I am from and the journey I've endured, I have a strong sense of my identity and how I fit in society.

LIMITATIONS TOWARDS THEORIES

I resonated with Josselson's theory pathway to identity, though I thought much like Marcia's theory, it was very overly general and complex. Individuals, regardless of gender, has a unique way developing identity and thus to limit their journey to four pathways is very

restricting. Especially in our modern times, and the numerous social identities can greatly influence one's pathway. There were times where it was difficult for me to categorize myself because there were parts of each pathway that I did not identify with. "It is also essentialist, in that it allows no room for variation in development across life span, suggesting instead that developmental crises unfold in an invariant, linear way," (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 61). In other words, Josselson/Marcia's theory appeared to target traditional age college students. Traditional aged students can experience these pathways very differently when compared to a non-traditional aged students, thus I'd be curious on how Josselson or Marcia would explain their pathways in the lens of an older student.

Where Josselson/Marcia lacked in ethnic culture aspect, Phinney's model of Ethnic Identity Development covered. A limitation in Phinney's model includes the lack of intersectionality awareness. For an example: social class can greatly impact one's ability to connect with one's culture. Individuals may blame their lack of financial opportunities with their ethnicity and thus social identities can greatly impact if one achieves ethnic identity achievement, "the ways in which social identities intersect and demonstrate behavioral preferences reveal a major component of shifting identity development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 287). Within the different types of ethnic identities, there are different aspects to those identities. For an example: being a Chinese student is different than being a Korean student, also a third generation Japanese student, however, they are all considered Asians. Through Phinney's model, there is the limitation of categorizing multiple ethnic groups into one large group (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010)

RECOMMENDATION TOWARDS BEST PRACTICE

In order to best promote psychosocial development, universities need to create a space for students to share their stories so that students have the opportunity to acknowledge their different identities and how they all intersect. No two individuals are the same and thus, it is important to be aware and acknowledge differences amongst all students. An issue with our current society is that there individuals within different majors that don't engage in their own stories, thus, they conform to society without once analyzing who they are. Students do not feel the value of analyzing their identities and what it means to be privileged or oppressed. It is my recommendation to strive and encourage students to become aware of how their identities connect and how it can relate back to the larger society. In my opinion, it is currently not the norm to talk about these topics and to analyze your identity, therefore, in order to best promote psychosocial development, we need to create an opportunity for students to engage in these conversations. We need to have courses that promote awareness and the opportunity to analyze their identity. Some of our first year seminars introduce these concepts, however, as student affair professionals we need to expand it to students in all years so that they have more than one opportunity to be exposed and engaged in these topics and issues. Once students become more aware of their story and that everyone has a story (even if you might not think you do), more people will be better educated about themselves and others around them.

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